

# THE LONDON READER

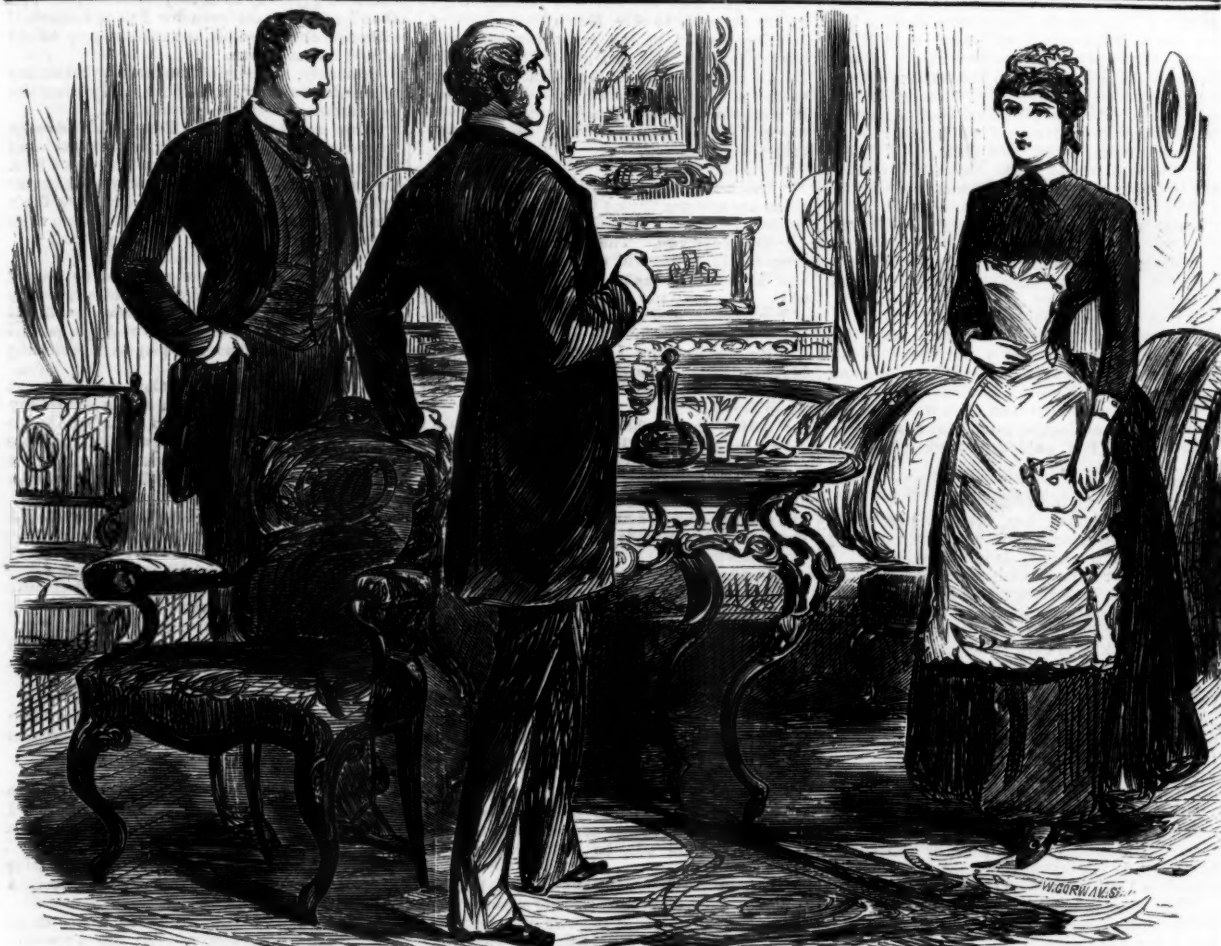
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["YOU HAD BETTER TELL MISS SMITH WE ARE WAITING FOR HER!" THE LAWYER SAID.]

## DEARER THAN GOLD.

—101—

### CHAPTER III.

THE trim parlour-maid at Fair View belonged to the house, and was no special retainer of Mrs. Charteris', consequently she had never seen Dick Granville before, and his anxious face made no impression upon her. She stood, for a moment, with the door in her hand, waiting to see if the arrival was really a visitor for Fair View; but she could not catch a word of the conversation between the two gentlemen.

Dick had no time for questions. Mr. Cameron pounced on him at once. He had known young Granville ever since Mr. Charteris adopted him, and felt a real interest in him, which a little excused the irritable tone in which he commanded,—

"Why on earth didn't you come before? I know you've been written to, for I posted the letter myself."

"I only got it to night. Surely my aunt is not too offended to see me?"

For Mr. Cameron stood between him and the gate as though to bar his entrance, and the parlour-maid at that moment shut the door.

"Mrs. Charteris died yesterday."

Dick staggered against a lamp-post, so sudden was the news. For years, now, this frail life had stood between him and fortune, and yet it came on him as a shock to hear that it had passed away.

"What was it?"

"General decay. You must have known she was in bad health."

"She has been in bad health ever since I remember her," said Dick, simply. "I never thought that she was worse than usual."

"Well, it's no use lamenting over your delay now, I suppose," said the lawyer, quietly; "but I'd have given a good round sum if you had been here sooner. I suppose you will stop in Hastings to-night? I am at the Duke's. You'd better put up there, for I have a great deal to say to you."

But when (at the lawyer's request to a waiter) the two men had been shown to a private sitting-room, Mr. Cameron made no

attempt to commence the conversation. He leaned his head on one arm, and looked into the fire, which the dulness of the spring evening made a welcome friend; but he said nothing, and at last Dick felt there was something ominous in his silence.

"Did my aunt leave any message for me? Did she seem hurt at my not coming?"

"She fancied you resented a letter of hers in which she urged that it was time you married."

"I never resented it. It kept me away from her, I confess, but I would have come directly had I got her summons."

"She was a strange woman. You lived in the same house with her for a good many years. Did it ever strike you she was revengeful?"

"Never. I thought her a kind, motherly creature. The only thing I could never understand was her cruelty to Helen. Granted the poor girl was erring, a mother might have forgiven her."

"Just so; but Mrs. Charteris was not her mother."

"Not her mother!"



"No. She married Mr. Charteris after his wife's death, and the children were brought up to regard her as their mother. She almost hated Helen because she grew up the image of her dead mother, who years before had come between Mrs. Charteris and her lover. It seems your remaining unmarried gave the old lady the impression you still cared for Helen, and meant to restore the fortune to her when it came to you."

Dick shook his head.

"I am not so disinterested. If I could find Helen, I would settle a handsome sum on her for her father's sake; but I own I love Field Royal too dearly ever to give it up. I was only a child of seven when I went there first, but I grew to care for every stone of its old grey walls. I don't think I am fond of money, but I could never give up Field Royal."

Mr. Cameron looked frowning.

"The will should not be discussed till after the funeral; but, Granville, we are old friends. I can't let you go on in a fool's paradise. Mrs. Charteris has left Field Royal away from you."

Dick grew white to his very lips. For a moment there was silence; then he said, quietly,—

"What has she done with it?"

"It is iniquitous—I think," said Mr. Cameron, frowning; "but I am bound to tell you she was in her sound mind. She made the will herself, before I got here, and then showed it to me and asked if it was legal. I told her it was legal enough, but desperately unfair. She has passed you over utterly, and left everything to her companion, Miss Smith."

Dick looked up incredulously.

"Left her estate, her savings, her whole property to a woman she had never set eyes upon six months ago? It is impossible!"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"It is true, unfortunately. Mrs. Charteris was given to strong likes and dislikes. She had a perfect infatuation for Miss Smith."

"Who took good care to turn it to her own account?"

"No," was the unexpected reply. "I don't think Miss Smith has the least idea of her good fortune. She is fretting herself to death, nearly, over her friend's loss. She was very fond of the old lady."

Something very like a snarl crossed Dick's mouth.

"She must have it, Mr. Cameron. Depend upon it, she plotted for it and schemed for it pretty thoroughly. Six months' flattery to be repaid by twenty thousand a year for life—it's not a bad investment!"

"You have a right to be indignant, and I think Mrs. Charteris treated you shamefully; but I am quite sure Miss Smith had no hand in it."

"She seems a favourite of yours?"

"I am sorry for her."

"Sorry for her! She has Field Royal and a fortune fit for a duchess! She does not need sympathy."

"I think she does. Can't you see Granville, everyone will take up the same idea as you have? The poor girl will be set down as a mercenary adventuress, whereas I assure you, she is nothing of the sort."

"Glad!" repeated Dick, hotly. "I say, poor she is five or six and thirty at the least!"

"I never asked her age. She may be twenty—she looks less."

"A quaking, impulsive child! Well, her tactics have not been very childish."

"You are hard on her, Dick! I guess you have every reason for annoyance, but Miss Smith is not the base creature you think her."

"My opinion matters very little," said Dick, contemptuously. "Twenty thousand a year will not be the part of charity and even a multitude of lies. I don't suppose people will trouble their heads to ask how Miss Smith came by her money; the great fact for them will be that she has it."

"When you see her I think you will change your mind," suggested Mr. Cameron, gravely.

"I shall not see her at all!"

"But the funeral?"

"If she goes I shall stay away. It's no use looking at me like that, Mr. Cameron. I have no intention of trying to upset the will. I shall not commit suicide because I've lost a fortune, and I bear no malice to Mrs. Charteris; but I won't meet the creature who persuaded her into a deed as unjust as it was needless."

"Mrs. Charteris told me her sole reason for passing you over was her fear you would give up the property to Mrs. Nairn."

"She carried hatred and revenge, then, to her death-bed. If I had given it up to Mrs. Nairn, Helen has a thousand times more right to it than Miss Petronella Smith. But there is something melodramatic about this very name. Well, she is not likely to make anything over to Helen."

"She cannot!"

"She won't want to. But do you mean there are any conditions to this extraordinary bequest?"

"There are two. The management of the property is to remain entirely in my hands, and Miss Smith has no power to alienate any of it. She may not even anticipate a shilling of her income, and if she dies childless, everything reverts to you."

"By which time I should be a modern Methuselah. She's certain to marry; there will be plenty of people to woo the mistress of Field Royal."

"I wish you would see her!"

"Once for all I will not; my mind is quite made up on that point. Perhaps you are thinking matrimony would be a good expedient, and we could share the property. I would not ask such a woman as that to be my wife if she were worth her weight in gold, so that scheme won't answer."

"It was Mrs. Charteris's great wish. She told me to bring about a meeting between you."

"How long was Miss Smith with her?"

"Since last autumn—October, I think."

"How did she find her?"

"I fancy Mrs. Charteris advertised for a companion, and Miss Smith applied for the post. She is very pretty, and my wife says very good. I don't know much about young ladies myself, but Mrs. Cameron has taken a great fancy to her."

"Indeed. That is something in her favour! Cameron, I think I could bear this better for myself, but I have my mother and sisters to think of. This will be an awful blow to them!"

"I don't see it," said the lawyer, bluntly. "You've never cost your mother a penny piece for twenty odd years, and in the course of nature you'd have married, and your wife would have been mistress of Field Royal. I can't see what Mrs. Granville has to complain of. I don't suppose you will have to ask her to help you; you've your two hundred a year safe still!"

Dick knew his mother would complain, even if she had no just cause. He knew, too, he would fall from his high place; he would no longer be the prosperous one of the family; he would be of almost as little account as Bob.

For a moment there came before him a picture of fighting his way to fame, of winning a fortune as noble as the one he had lost, and of laying it all at a girl's feet, and winning her dear love as a reward; then he came back to practical everyday life. He did not believe in gifts! Of the two he had been most interested in; one had jilted him long ago; the other, after he had saved her life, had not even troubled to send him word of her welfare.

There was very little sleep for Dick that night. When the plans of a lifetime are overthrown, and one has to begin again; so to say, at the bottom of the ladder, one feels almost too sad for sleep.

Dick Granville was no coward; but of actual hard work he was quite ignorant. He had been content to go on picking up two or three hundred a year by his pleasant mother's pen

and ink. He had been satisfied with a moderate income for the present, certain that the future was provided for; and now his fortune had taken to itself wings, and he must depend entirely on himself.

He had no debts. In the terrible depression of the first discovery of his loss this seemed his only consolation! He owed no one anything; and so, like Longfellow's village blacksmith, could look the whole world in the face. He had no ties; those cosy bachelor chambers could be given up at a very brief notice, and then he could start even for Fiji or Iceland, if either of those islands seemed likely to afford a field for his genius.

Seriously, he thought he should be better off in England until his relations had got over the first brunt of their disappointment.

What would they say? They had been eager to accompany him to Hastings, to make sure Miss Smith did not walk off with any of Mrs. Charteris's possessions; but they had never dreamed the companion would become their brother's rival, and enjoy the fortune they regarded as already his!

Bob Dick!

He had all his life been regarded as one of fortune's favourites; the halo of prosperity had hung over him so long it was very difficult to come down from his comfortable quarters and receive condolence and pity with becoming grace.

He breakfasted with Mr. Cameron the next morning, and found the lawyer's sympathy decidedly embarrassing. In vain he tried to shut him up, in vain he strove to change the subject, and talk of the Hastings climate, the last murder, or anything else except Mrs. Charteris and her will.

John Cameron came back to the poor lady's last conversation with desperate persistence; he, too, had thought a great deal during the night, and he was quite resolved in his own mind that Dick's fortune could be restored if only that confident young gentleman would consent to be introduced to Petronella Smith.

"I shall have to go up to London by the midday train; but I can take you to call at Fair View first," he said.

"I have no intention of calling, thank!"

"The funeral is fixed for Thursday. You had really better meet Miss Smith before that day!"

Dick gave himself up promptly.

"I shall attend my aunt's funeral if I hire a cab and follow the tail of the cortege, but I will not meet Miss Smith. I regard her as a scheming, mercenary adventuress!"

"She is a singularly pretty and attractive girl. I assure you, Mr. Granville, she is a lady born and bred."

"What a pity you have not a grown-up son," said Dick, coldly. "I am sure you would be delighted to secure Miss Smith as a daughter-in-law."

"I only want you to see her. I am quite certain that if you were once introduced to her—"

"I should own she was worthy even of Field Royal," put in Dick, interrupting him. "Thank you, but I would rather think she was unworthy. If I don't see her I can indulge myself by drawing fancy pictures of her charms."

Mr. Cameron had to give it up at any rate for the present; he had no job. He went to London that day, proposing to return in time for the funeral.

Dick stayed on at the hotel; he was not in the least hurry to convey his change of fortune to the ladies at Fair View. Hastings suited him very well as a temporary sojourn, and he could plan out his duties quite as easily there as in London.

No doubt his altered position made the Duke's usual commonplace domestic, but Dick was of opinion it would be time enough to institute economies when he had introduced his calamity to the world at large.

In one particular, however, he did reform; he renounced a private sitting-room, and this year he took the rest of his meals in the coffee-room; but this change



sprang as much from a distaste for solitude as a desire for economy.

Dick loved the study of his fellow-creatures, and he enjoyed it abundantly now.

The Duke's was a very good class hotel, of the kind frequented mostly by regular patrons, the same people coming year after year. Commercial men were almost unknown there; fashionable matrons with very gadabout daughters eschewed it; there were about twenty people staying in the house now, any one of them bearing the stamp of assured prosperity and substantial comfort; for the most part well-to-do middle class families and stray professional men; but the very evening after Mr. Cameron's departure there arrived two strangers, who were so utterly unlike the habitués of the hotel that even the waiters themselves thought they must have strayed into the Duke's by mistake.

It was not that they were poor. Though of somewhat flashy style, their clothes were new and fairly well made; they both had at least the outside veneer which often passes current for politeness.

They seemed easily satisfied, and gave little trouble; but Dick Granville, who sat opposite them at dinner, felt they reminded him of two goats who had strayed by mistake among the sheep. Of two things he was positive, they had not come to the Duke's by chance, and but for some very strong inducement they would have preferred a more rakish hotel.

Dick labelled them in his mental note-book as dangerous; but he hardly knew which he disliked most.

The elder might have been fifty—a dark, forbidding-looking man, with a sinister though handsome face, and a trick of watching everything that went on from under his long, thick lashes.

The other was much younger, and his expression firmer. Having fixed his mind on a thing the dogged look on his mouth seemed to say nothing would turn him from it.

Dick pitied anyone at the mercy of either of this choice pair; but while from Mr. Fox they might expect an oath and a blow, the younger man would have meted out a course of systematic cruelty, prepared with the refinement of cunning.

The elder of the two gave all the orders to the waiters, but for all that the other was the real leader.

Dick Granville, in spite of his own troubles, watched these two attentively, and felt a languid curiosity to know what could possibly have brought them to Hastings.

Not pleasure! They would have found their in far wilder scenes. Not the pursuit of health, for, in spite of a somewhat dissipated air, both seemed robust. It could hardly be business, for the pleasant Saxon health-resort does little "business" beyond buying and selling, while these men had nothing commercial about them, and, if they earned a living at all, certainly did so by horses, cards, or dice.

Neither of them spoke beyond the merest commonplace at dinner.

Dick began to think he was mistaken, and there was nothing strange about them after all; but later that night, while strolling on the esplanade with a cigar, he saw the two sitting in the "glass-house," which are such a favourite resort on windy evenings. There was a vacant seat at angles with them, and Dick took it, feeling the air would convey him quite enough of their conversation to prove whether there was any truth in his suspicions. He hardly knew exactly what these suspicions were.

Dick Granville was a story writer, and always on the look-out for romance. He fancied there was a "history" in these men's sudden appearance at the Duke's Hotel, but of what it was he had not the least idea.

The first word he overheard made him start. They might be the merest coincidence, but they awoke an echo in his heart.

"It's no use, my boy! She's gone clean off! I don't say but what she's to blame; but it's six months turned since she left Harwich, and

if she meant us to find her we should have done it before now."

The younger man waited a minute, and then said, sullenly,—

"I mean to find her, if I spend my life in doing it! I never have been conquered by any woman yet, and I don't mean that Nell shall be the first!"

Was it a coincidence merely, or could it be that he was listening to the story of the girl whose life he had saved?

Could it be that two girls, both called Nell, escaped from the same place six months before?

"I don't envy her particularly when you do find her," said the elder man approvingly; "but, my good fellow, you'd much better give it up! It's only waste of time. The girl must be dead, and that's the only thing that could explain it. Bless you, she'd not stay away from me like this. The child had a very tender conscience, and she promised her mother she'd look after me."

"Quite superfluous, my friend!" returned the other lightly, "since you are the best possible hand at taking care of yourself! But I differ from you! I believe Miss Nell is alive, and I intend to find her!"

"I should like to know how you propose to set about it. You have wasted plenty of time already."

"Because I had not the clue."

"And have you got it now?"

"I have! She was seen here a month ago. Bruce could not be mistaken in her; besides, she turned deadly white when she saw him!"

"A month ago some hundreds of people were here who have gone now. The winter is the season there."

"Bruce was an idiot not to write at once; but he declares she was living here. She was at the railway station changing some novels at the book-stall. Now, people can't subscribe to Smith's for less than three months!"

"Why don't you go to the book-stall?"

"Because I have ascertained that the clerk in charge was changed only last week. No; Nell was here a month ago, and I believe she is here now! At any rate, here I mean to stay until I have unearthed her!"

"I can't see the use of it."

"And I can! Really your fatherly anxiety is not equal to mine. You don't seem in the least concerned about your daughter's fate!"

"I think I was glad when she went," said Fox, half reluctantly. "Some girls you can't mind to anything. Nell was different. She would never have been of any use to us."

"Wait and see."

"You've got to find her first."

"I shall haunt the pier and the esplanade at the fashionable hours. I shall go to church on Sundays as regularly as a young lady; I shall make inquiries at all the schools."

"If she is here," said Mr. Fox, thoughtfully, "I wonder how in the world she gets her living. She never went to school in her life, so I don't see how she can be a governess; and, as she was as proud as Lucifer, I don't believe she would serve in a shop!"

"She may have attracted the pity of some charitable old maid; she had the most child-like face," said the second man, bitterly. "If ever there was a girl who might have been a fortune to us it's Nell, and she shall come to her senses yet. I'm not going to be defied by a bit of a girl like that!"

They walked away, and Dick Granville was left thinking over the fragments he had heard.

He knew it was a far-fetched idea—he knew many prudent people would think him crazy; but in his own mind there was no doubt the two men he had just seen were her father and the "friend," to escape from whom poor little Nell had been ready to seek a home beneath the cold, cruel water.

At the time he had believed the "friend" to be a woman, possibly Nell's stepmother; but there was nothing in the girl's story to show it could not have been a man.

Every pulse of Dick's honest heart was roused with sympathy for the girl.

She had not troubled to thank him, or to send him word of her safety; but he must try and save her once again. To think of Nell, with her sweet, sad face, her mournful innocent beauty, in the power of men like these, was to him little short of profanation.

But how was he to save her? He knew nothing of her movements since September, when she had started for home. If he rushed off to Norfolk the very next day he had no clue to her address there. Besides, the man had said positively she was in Hastings a month ago, which proved that she had left Cromer.

Dick would willingly have hunted for Nell patiently amid all the usual resorts for visitors in Hastings; but he felt the difficulty and the tediousness of the task. Besides, this was their plan, and he wanted different weapons.

At last, almost as an inspiration, there came to him the idea of the newspapers.

He knew one or two things which were secret to Nell and himself; he might, perhaps, allude to one of them in the advertisement, and so make it strike her; though it would suggest nothing to an outsider. But it was difficult—very difficult. He feared to say too much, lest he should attract the notice of the two men.

He spent hours over his advertisement, and altered the wording again and again; but he satisfied himself at last, and the day of Mrs. Charteris's funeral all the chief London newspapers contained the following appeal:—

"**TELLSTOWE.**—If the young lady who spent some hours there on a Sunday night last September should see this will she take the warning of her companion there, and at once change her abode? She is in great danger from those she fears."

#### CHAPTER IV.

MR. CAMERON was quite astonished at Dick Granville's cheerfulness when he returned to Hastings.

The cynical disappointment seemed to have left him; his tone had regained its genial ring of hopefulness, and he was quite changed from the bitter, satirical young man whom the lawyer had left.

It would seem that have amazed the legal luminary had he been told the cause of the alteration, and known that instead of thinking about his own future all Mr. Granville's energy had been expended on planning how to save a girl he had only seen once from being reclaimed by her father and natural guardian; but there was no one to tell Mr. Cameron the truth, and so he could enjoy Dick's improved spirits comfortably.

"And what are you going to do next?" demanded the lawyer as they sat smoking after dinner. "I need not tell you if you will take up your profession I will do my best to put business in your way."

Dick shook his head.

"Thanks; but I shall never make a barrister. I mean to devote myself to story-writing. Having suffered so much myself through a woman I ought to be able to describe other people's troubles."

"You really mean to give yourself up to novel-writing?"

"I do!" Dick looked at the old lawyer with a smile. "Terribly frivolous, isn't it? But you see, Mr. Cameron, there will be no one to mourn over my folly now. I can never be master of Field Royal—a relation to be revered and courted, so I think I may as well please myself. My mother and the girls will be horrified; but now I need not consider their feelings."

"They cannot feel anything but sympathy with you for Mrs. Charteris's injustice."

Dick shook his head.

"Oh! I don't say they would abuse my poor old aunt enough, but I don't think that would make me any happier. I'd much rather consider her as a weak-minded old lady who was

quite under the influence of a strong-minded companion."

"If only you would consent to see Miss Smith!"

"What possible good could result from it?"

"You might fall in love with her."

Mr. Granville laughed outright.

"I am not quite so susceptible. Besides, if I did I could not marry her. With two hundred a-year all told I should need impudence indeed to woo the heiress of Field Royal."

"You see it will hurt her feelings so if you persist in ignoring her."

"She has a golden salve for every injury."

"Mr. Granville," persisted the lawyer, "I never told a falsehood in my life. Take my word now when I assure you Miss Smith knows nothing of the contents of your aunt's will. By refusing to meet her to-morrow you fix a cruel slur on a girl as innocent and defenceless as woman could be. See her just once, at the reading of the will. You can depart the instant it is over. The meeting can't pledge you in the least to any future intimacy or even acquaintance. Only yield this much. Go back with me to Fair View after the funeral?"

"If I do it will be solely to oblige you," said Dick, irresolutely. "Every instinct I have warns me to stay away."

"I will undertake the whole of the obligation, Dick. I am sure you will never regret your compliance."

Poor Dick! In his pocket were long letters from Mrs. Granville and her three daughters, full of congratulations on his good fortune (?).

They had seen the death in the papers, and marvelled they had not heard from him. Why did he not write to them? Would he like them to go down to Field Royal, and have all things in readiness for his reception.

He need not mind troubling them in the least; they could leave The Laurels in charge of a tenant, or even let it for six months, if he thought he should be dull, alone in that great, empty house, &c., &c.

Poor Dick! He had tried so hard to believe in his relations, and it was such difficult work. He had not answered one of the letters.

As soon as the funeral was over he should go back to London, and from there he must send word to Dring of what had happened, but he was putting off the evil day as long as he could.

He could bear his loss of fortune, but he had a shrewd idea there was another loss to follow.

It was a very quiet funeral. Mrs. Charteris had particularly ordered it so. It did not leave Fair View until two o'clock, and the lawyer and Dick were the only mourners. The dead woman had left no near relations except the stepdaughter on whom she had been so hard.

Had things been different Dick would have sought out his cousin and bidden her husband to the funeral, but as it was he felt it far better not to arouse false hopes in the riding-master's heart.

He was quite powerless to help the Nairns, and so his friendship could do nothing for them. He had never met Helen's husband, but he knew from his uncle it was not only Mr. Nairn's calling and poverty they had objected to.

There were one or two dark secrets in his past which, if known, would have prevented Mr. Charteris effectually from having suffered Helen even to see him.

Nothing had been heard of her now for years. Dick had always meant to befriend her when he came into his fortune. Well, there did not seem much chance of his be-friending anyone now.

As he entered Fair View at the appointed hour Mr. Granville wondered a little what style of woman his rival would prove. He had yielded solely to oblige his old friend. Personally he would far rather have joined the procession at the grave, but Dick had in him a strong vein of pity. He could not bear to show a slight to the dead. Whatever she had done now he could not forget that for

many years Mrs. Charteris had treated him as a son, so he felt it a kind of duty to go to her house and pay the last mark of respect to her memory.

Mr. Cameron met him in the hall, and led him into the dining-room.

"Miss Smith is lying down with a bad headache. She will meet us when we come back."

Dick inclined his head gravely. He did not want to speak evil of Petronella Smith in the house where her benefactress lay dead.

Very soon they started. It was probably the simplest funeral ever given to a woman of such wealth.

As he stood by the grave the fierce resentment died out of Dick's heart. After all, had the fortune come to him he would have been despoiling Helen. He had youth and strength, an income sufficient to save him from actual want; it would be hard indeed if he could not make something of his life independent of his aunt's fortune.

It was over. Dust had returned to dust, earth to earth. The woman who had found it impossible to forgive poor erring Helen had been left in her last home, and the two mourners drove back to Fair View. The same maid ushered them into the dining room, but it was empty.

"You had better tell Miss Smith we are waiting for her," said the lawyer, a little stiffly.

After all his exertions and persuasions to induce Dick Granville to return with him, it would be annoying indeed if his protégée absented herself on the plea of a headache.

The maid stood still as though she had not heard, and he repeated his order in a louder tone.

"Please, sir, Miss Smith has gone!"

"Gone!"

"She went at ten o'clock this morning," continued the Abigail. "I gave you the note myself, sir!"

"But the note said she was lying down with a bad headache!" thundered Mr. Cameron.

"There is some terrible mistake, girl!"

"I must have given you the wrong note, I suppose, sir," said Mary, thoughtfully. "Miss Smith was terribly ill when she first got up, and I persuaded her to go and lie down and write to say she was too ill to see you. When she had read her letters she seemed to change her mind. She told me she must leave Hastings at once, and she'd write and explain. Of course I gave you the note I found on her table, sir, and I'm sure I thought it was the one."

"Do you mean that Miss Smith has gone for good?" demanded the lawyer, gravely.

"Just that, sir," returned Mary. "She said I was to give all the bills and things to you. It would have made your heart ache to look at her, sir, she seemed so white and ill, but her one idea was to get away."

"You mean her letters had bad news, and she was sent for in a hurry?"

"I don't know, sir. It must have been the letters, for she had no thought of going till I took them up to her; but she was in such a hurry she forgot all about them, and they are lying on her table now."

Mr. Cameron rose.

"I am going upstairs," he said, slowly, to Dick, "and I wish you would come with me. I don't like this affair. There is something mysterious about it."

The two gentlemen, preceded by Mary, went straight to the companion's room. It was a very pretty apartment, and the trifles about showed them that Miss Smith's flight had been utterly unexpected.

Her dresses still hung in the wardrobe; her books and work were on the table. A little davenport drawn close to the sofa showed that she had been writing letters.

Mr. Cameron took up one addressed to himself, doubtless the one he ought to have received hours before. He held it unopened in his hand, while Mary directed his attention to two common blue envelopes close by.

"These are the letters I brought Miss Smith, sir. You wouldn't think they had anything important in them, would you?"

"Assuredly not! Anyone picking up either would have set it down as a bill or a circular."

Mr. Cameron put on his spectacles, and proceeded to read them coolly through. He was not much assisted, since the first was from a dressmaker, promising to send the rest of Miss Smith's mourning the following day, and the second was a bill for boot-mending, presenting a total of five shillings!

"I cannot make it out!"

"You had better read the letter," said Dick, coolly. "The explanation is simple enough; she knew she had obtained my aunt's fortune by evil influence, and she was afraid of me!"

"Fiddlesticks!" said the lawyer, wrathfully. "She wasn't afraid of anyone. I don't believe she knew what fear was."

"Well, read the letter!"

They were back in the dining-room now. Mary had retired to spread the news in the kitchen.

In spite of his assertions, Mr. Cameron opened the missing girl's letter with great reluctance. He and his wife had both taken a great fancy to Miss Smith; indeed, he had come to Hastings armed with a warm invitation from his Maggie for the lonely girl to come to them until her plans were settled.

At any time her disappearance would have troubled him; but coming now, when Dick Granville must hear of it, and would doubtless scoff at his credulity, it was extra hard.

"Why don't you read what she has to say?" asked Dick. "Don't consider me, pray!"

"It has nothing to do with you," said the lawyer, grimly; and then he did as he was asked, and broke the seal of Petronella's farewell.

"DEAR FRIEND (for such you have ever been to me). I am writing to say good-bye to you, for when you return from the funeral I shall be gone. I am thankful now that Mrs. Charteris is dead. It would have broken my heart to leave her while she needed me, and I have had news which forces me to go away at once. Do not try to find me. It is my last prayer. You would only add to the sorrows of

"PETRONELLA SMITH."

To say that Petronella's note surprised Mr. Cameron was to put it far too mildly. He was literally amazed!

Remember, he had seen her with Mrs. Charteris, the two being far more like mother and daughter than employer and employee.

He knew that she had well-nigh made herself ill with grief at the death of her benefactress, and, lo! now she was actually thankful that Mrs. Charteris had been taken. She implied plainly that had the widow still lived she must have left her just the same.

She had taken nothing with her—they had Mary's word for it—but a small hand-bag.

Mrs. Charteris had once told her lawyer that Petronella came to her poor and friendless; yet here was the girl voluntarily giving up the many generous presents made her in the last six months, and the certainty of a warm recommendation for another engagement from the lawyer. Only last night she had said to him, "You will help me to find another home?" and he, not caring to tell her then of the luxurious estate awaiting her, had answered simply, "Yes!"

And now, not twenty-four hours later, she had flown, declaring she had bad news!

Not a creature had seen her since he left her the night before; the only letters she had received were of the most trivial character, and yet she distinctly said in her note that she was "forced to go away."

She begged him not to seek her, because it would only add to her sorrow.

What in the world did she mean? Had the poor girl's brain given way, or was there truly a mystery in her life?

(To be continued.)



## EDEN'S SACRIFICE.

—20:—

## CHAPTER XVII.—(continued.)

GORDON straightened himself with that suddenness that a man does when he parries the effect of a heavy blow.

The light died from his eyes, and he lifted his hand to raise the damp hair from his forehead.

"Cannot!" he repeated, vaguely.

"No."

"Why?"

"Why? Can you ask? Because it would be a most deliberate sin against the laws of heaven. Can I promise to love, honour, and obey a man whom I know to be a criminal? Besides, Herbert Staunton still lives!"

Gordon started.

Labouring under the excitement of the moment, he had forgotten Herbert Staunton—forgotten that the girl whom he loved was Staunton's legal wife; and as he remembered, a terrible, burning hatred filled his heart.

He realised that, once released from his power, Eden was liable to meet her husband at any time; that an explanation and reconciliation would follow.

His blood seemed to boil at the thought.

"Never—never!" he cried, mentally. "If I can but persuade her to go through the ceremony of marriage with me, all will be well. But I will kill him before she shall ever be his wife again!"

Then, aloud, he asked, with curious wistfulness,—

"And you love him still?"

"Heaven help me, I do!"

"Then you must acknowledge that love does not necessarily follow respect. Tell me, Eden, you could be happy, even now, believing yourself his lawful wife, could you not?"

"I could."

"Yet you know him to be guilty of crime. Listen to me, my darling! Love cannot always withstand silence and absence. Some day you will learn to forget him, and you have proved to yourself that love and esteem are not necessary adjuncts. Be my wife, and I solemnly promise you, upon the honour of a man who, however guilty, has never yet broken his word, that no act of my future life shall ever bring a flush of shame to your brow. I will for your sake become an honest man, or I will die and relieve you of my presence. Eden, will you save your brother and me at the same time?"

The scene was agony to the girl.

Gordon's earnest pleading, yet shamefaced resolution, left no room for doubt. It was a sacrifice of self or her brother, and the decision was a terrible one. Her lips quivered with anguish.

All the old childish love for her brother came over her. She saw herself again as in those dear, happy, careless days, sitting by his side, with her embroidery, or walking with him through the daisy-covered fields, while they made their plans for the future, swearing that no love, however great for wife or husband, should ever divide them, insisting that no sacrifice would be large enough to show their infinite love.

As it all came over her again memory proved too much, and, sinking into a large chair, she buried her face upon its arm, and burst into a passion of tears that was terrible.

When she lifted her head at last Gordon was kneeling beside her, his own countenance white and drawn with suffering.

"You can't think what your grief is costing me," he whispered, hoarsely. "It is maddening! Yet every tear is a fetter that binds you closer to me. Eden, let me prove my love for you in this. Promise to be my wife, and I swear that my men shall not injure your brother, nor anyone else who is dear to you. Yesterday the woman they call my sister became the betrothed wife of your old friend, Walter Marchmont."

"Good heavens!"

"I will prevent that. I will not allow him to be injured in any way, and, further than that, I solemnly swear to you that I will ask you to be

nothing more to me than my friend, my cherished sister, until such time as I can win your heart, and receive your voluntary permission to be your husband."

Eden swung herself to her feet, her hand pressed upon her chest, and looked down upon him wildly.

"What assurance have I," she gasped, "that you will keep your word?"

He arose, and leaned again against the cabinet, returning her gaze sorrowfully.

"I have sunk low indeed!" he said, bitterly. "Ask yourself, Eden, why should I lie to you? You are absolutely in my power; there is no chance of escape. What I ask of you is simply that you remain with me voluntarily, that you need be no longer a prisoner, while my privileges will be precisely the same as they now are. I will give you an opportunity of discovering whether I have told the truth or not concerning your brother and Marchmont. Then, I presume, you will believe."

"How can I know about my brother?"

"I will go with you myself to-morrow night, to a place where you can watch the house and be convinced."

"How is that possible?"

"Trust me and see. The robbery was to take place to-morrow night. I will not ask you to be my wife till the day following."

"And Walter Marchmont?"

"Alice shall leave there at once!"

"And then?"

"We will leave here, Eden, or remain, as you will. You will again be free—free as the air you breathe—and I will have an incentive to honesty, to a new life. I have never had the hand of purity extended to me, but was cradled in crime and dishonour. I have never loved any being in this world until I met you, and it has given me the strongest desire of my life in my hope of winning you, and of retrieving my mispent years. Oh, Eden, have you no pity for me—no wish whatever to help me?"

The glow of burning coals was in her eyes.

"Pity! What pity have you had for me? My life was a heaven until the woman you call your sister entered it to accuse. Was it not at your instigation? You would force me into a despicable union to save my brother and my friend, who has been a second brother. Very well, Wilfred Gordon—or Rupert Howard—you have won. I consent to be your wife the day after to-morrow under the conditions you have named; but never ask me for pity or for help. You have transformed me from a timid, shrinking, loving girl to a revengeful woman. I loathe, I despise you, and yet I will be your wife. Now go!"

The man obeyed her.

Outside the room he leaned against the door and groaned.

"Where has all my commanding nature gone?" he muttered. "I am like a whipped dog beneath the lash of her hatred. But it will not last—it shall not! I will win her, heart and soul. She shall love me as she has never loved any being in this world. Other women have, why not she? Oh, Eden, Eden! I cannot fail where existence itself demands that I shall succeed. We will go away—away where there will be no chance of her ever meeting him to learn the wrong I have done her; where there will be no opportunity for her to discover that she is Herbert Staunton's wife, and not mine!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE was little of the successful lover in Wilfred Gordon's manner as he left Eden, and less when he presented himself before Alice.

She had never appeared more charming, clothed—as she generally managed to adorn herself—in a diaphanous material that clung closely to her.

She was lying upon a couch when Gordon entered the apartment—lying in a luxurious position, with her white arms stretched lazily above her head.

She smiled without moving as he entered, and Gordon shuddered.

There was nothing either sweet or attractive in the picture to him; on the contrary, it repelled him.

He wondered how it had ever been possible to him to have seen a charm in such wanton vanity. The haggard lines upon his countenance deepened.

"What has happened, my Apollo?" she interrogated, lazily. "You seem—shall I say not happy? Sit down and let me cheer you. Circumstance has never been more flattering. My dear Gordon, you frown while a fortune is awaiting your acceptance. Ungrateful boy!"

He flung himself into an arm-chair near her, and leaned his head upon his hand.

"You are exceedingly beautiful," he said, thoughtfully.

She laughed softly.

"You are not falling in love with me, are you?" she asked, playfully. "That would be an exceedingly awkward situation."

"Absurd! I admire you as I might a magnificent horse, whose devilish temper prevented any desire for possession. I can see you, but I don't love you—bah!"

She was not at all discomposed at the uncomplimentary reply; on the contrary, she smiled with exceeding good humour.

"That is better," she said, contentedly. "I see that we regard each other in exactly the same ratio, which is fortunate. With your face and figure you ought to marry an heiress."

"Thanks!" answered Gordon, dryly. "I prefer coining."

"Oh, of course, every one to his taste—only there isn't so much risk."

"And less life."

"You didn't come here to tell me that, my dear. What was it?"

Gordon's face flushed dully.

"I came to ask you if you don't think you are setting a small valuation on your beauty."

The woman raised herself upon her elbow and looked at him intently.

The smile had left her, and a little wrinkle, like the first curl in a rose-leaf, gathered between her eyes.

"Of what are you thinking?" she asked, slowly. "I don't believe I exactly comprehend you."

"I mean that Walter Marchmont's fortune is too small for the risk you take," he replied, desperately. "You must give that up."

"You have some one else in view?"

"No—that is, not just yet."

She sat up and brushed away the clustering hair from her brow.

"What are you talking about?" she demanded. "Half a week ago, had I declined to be a party to the scheme which you yourself hatched, you would have strangled me. Don't treat me as if I were a child, Rupert. Tell me what it is that you wish?"

He did not look at her.

"I wish you," he answered, rising, thrusting his hands deeply into his trousers' pockets and walking the floor nervously, "to bring your visits here and your engagement to Walter Marchmont to an abrupt end."

An ominous silence followed; and then slowly, as a great abiny cobra uncoils, she arose and placed herself before him.

Her arms were folded behind her, her head was lifted, her eyes held his defiantly.

"Why?" she asked, simply.

"For reasons—which I cannot explain."

"Then I refuse! What has come over you of late? Are you mad to think that I, a woman with neither fear nor conscience, would resign thousands of pounds for reasons which you cannot explain?"

"You know I would not ask it were it not necessary."

"Then explain the necessity."

"I cannot."

"Pooh? I understand it all now. You—idiot!" with indescribable scorn and contempt. "You have fallen in love with that baby—that pauper! and you make this demand of me because she has asked it. Ha, ha! Were not your insanity so pitiable, it would be laughable. Fortunately, I am not yet a lunatic. Go away! You are maudlin, and sicken me."

She turned from him with a little shiver of

disgust, and sat down, taking one knee in her embrace childishly.

He stood before her, and looked down upon her sternly.

"You seem to take this as a huge jest," he said, earnestly; "but I am most serious. I have never asked you to give up anything before, but I demand this of you. It isn't as if you loved Marchmont, or as if he were the only man like ever to yield to your fascinations. Everything with me depends upon it."

"You mean Eden?"

"Well, then—yes."

The dainty, couch-shell cheeks burned with an angry crimson, while the eyes blazed.

"And you think I will resign all this that I have humiliated myself to gain, because of her? Never!" she cried, scornfully. "I would see you rot in gaol first."

The tone and manner aroused every dormant demon in Gordon's bosom.

He seized her wrist, and by a sudden movement stood her upon her feet.

Then he dropped it as though the delicate flesh were a firebrand.

"You are making me forget myself, and that you are a woman," he said, demurely. "Listen to me! There is no reason why we should quarrel—every reason why we should not. You know that so long as I live you will never want. Then, cannot you wait for a little while for a great strike? Eden has promised to—be my wife, provided you give this up, and—"

"You don't mean to tell me that you seriously contemplate so mad an act as that?"

"I do."

"Then I tell you frankly that I will assist you in no way—absolutely none."

"You dare—"

"I don't threaten me. You can injure me no more than I can you. Tell Walter Marchmont that I am your legal wife, and I shall at once proceed to make Eden Staunton also aware of that most delectable fact."

"You know as well as I how impossible that is. You could never reach her presence."

"There are always Malcolm Carlton and Herbert Staunton. Come, my dear, don't be an utter fool! A house divided cannot stand. I don't propose to interrupt your plans, and I don't propose to have you interfere with my financial arrangements. It is so ill bred to be continually threatening each other."

"Then let it cease. I have never asked a favour of you in my life, but I do beseech you to grant me this. You have loved, therefore you can feel for me. I promise you that you shall lose nothing by doing as I desire. Will you not grant me this?"

"Emphatically, no!"

"You are taking the last hope out of my life. Oh, I am so tired of it all—so bitterly tired! If I could but begin life again, I should be willing to commence as a day-labourer. Anything—anything to escape the hideousness of the shadow with which I have darkened my own existence!"

"Why don't you reform and become a minister?" sneered the woman. "At least you could show the error of wrong from experience. What a remarkable influence that child has! and what a pity it is that she does not reciprocate your affection!"

"The greatest possible pity, for it would mean a soul's salvation to me. Alice, look at me! I have never loved before any human being as I do that girl. I am willing to do anything to gain her. My love has humbled me to the very dust, and I entreat you to aid me in this!"

"Non-sense, Rupert. Let us end this. Once for all, I will not do what you ask. It is the height of absurdity. You are the last person I ever expected to see guilty of such sentimental rubbish. Love! Bah! you know nothing of love! Do you suppose the man who loves would degrade the object of his affection—?"

"Don't say any more!" cried Gordon, warningly. "No, I don't; and by that I gauge my love, for I have sworn that though she may believe herself my wife, she shall be nothing beyond my sister until I can have the legal and moral right to claim her as such."

His accomplice laughed loudly.

"The legal and moral right, you say? And what do you propose to do with me, my liege lord? No, no! I can't trust you with that child. I don't love you, my handsome husband—not in the very least—but you are absolutely necessary to me. Why, this excitement upon which we live has grown to be air and food to me. I live upon it. Now do be sensible. Look at me, Rupert. I am only a little fragile creature, like a lovely piece of Sèvres china, and yet no man could ever look into my eyes and doubt my strength of purpose. Now listen! If you don't let that girl alone, or at least if you don't give up the insane idea you have in your head, I shall have you thrown into prison. Should you attempt in any way to spoil my chances with Marchmont, I shall tell him at once where Eden is. Nothing could keep him from her presence. Now don't be a fool. Retire gracefully, since you haven't the ghost of a chance against me."

Gordon stood quite still, gazing at her in stony silence.

His eyes held an expression that she had never seen there before, and though she made no sign, she was secretly frightened.

He was evidently revolving some plan, some dangerous scheme, and her total inability to fathom it startled her.

She put out her hand and laid it upon his caressingly.

"Don't let us quarrel!" she exclaimed, persuasively. "Why should we?"

He shook off her touch with a slight shiver.

"I have given you your choice, and you have made it," he said, in a hoarse, strained voice. "Don't forget that. I even tried to plead with you, but you would not hear. Remember that, also."

He turned and left the room.

She watched him with a curious throbbing at the heart until the door had closed upon him, then she put out her hand and drew a French novel towards her.

But it had lost its charm. A pale, handsome, haggard face came between her and the page—a face that stared up at her regretfully, and yet threateningly.

She knew the man thoroughly. What was he going to do?

She threw the book from her, and, rising, she walked the floor hastily. Her head was bowed, her arms behind her.

She tried to think, yet still that curiously set face intruded itself until she could remember nothing but the singularity of its expression.

The small teeth were firmly clenched, and an audible sound issued through the dilated nostrils.

"I will not yield," she muttered. "What right has he to ask it? Let him do what he will. He will find that I am a match for him. His, legally and morally! Ha! ha! not yet. I look like a baby, but I am a giantess in reckless courage, and Rupert Howard shall find it so."

## CHAPTER XIX.

SINCE the evening of Eden's disappearance from her husband's side, Herbert Staunton and Malcolm Carlton had been the most inseparable of friends.

A full history of the misfortunes of the former's life had been given to Malcolm—a history filled with sorrow, but darkened by not one act of dishonour.

His error had been in not telling Eden the secret of his birth, and the shame of an early marriage with a woman who had deceived him, but that a man with strong passions like Carlton could readily forgive.

Indeed, Bertie seemed to have taken Eden's place with him, and the two were rarely apart.

"I should think you could never cease to remember," Bertie said to him, one day, "that but for me, Eden might be with you now, happy as in the days of old."

"The fault was not yours, but my own," Malcolm answered. "The error, after all, lay in misfortune, not fault; therefore, let us not speak of it. You are the only person upon earth whom I care for now."

A silent hand-shake had followed, and not long

afterwards a handsome house was engaged, and together they kept bachelor's hall.

There were no women employed—only men—and the two passed their evenings alone, caring little for amusements, and less for society, going out seldom, but absorbed in business, perhaps because there was nothing else to interest them.

They were engaged in most important speculations, risking everything with a recklessness that made lookers-on gasp with surprise; but whether with bull or bear the stock was sure to be with them. It seemed to flourish according to the turn of their hands.

"It is because neither of us care," David said, wearily. "It is because we would rather prefer to be poor. There is forgetfulness and rest in being compelled to earn one's daily bread. Fortune always smiles when no one cares for her frowns."

But nothing went wrong, and they sat in the evening, over their wine and cigars, thinking of the past, when other men were toiling upon sleepless couches, praying for the turn in the market that never came.

They were sitting one evening in their smoking-room, with the curtains drawn and the windows thrown open—it being a warm evening in late summer—a cloud of blue-grey smoke about either head, when suddenly a shrill scream wounded.

It was followed by a silence so dense that it was even more startling than the cry.

They were upon their feet simultaneously, looking from the window.

"It must have been from the house opposite!" exclaimed Bertie, hurriedly. "Had we not better inquire?"

Without waiting for an answer both seized their hats and sprang down the steps.

A moment later the bell in the house opposite clanged loudly.

A little maid answered—a girl with a white, scared face, and traces of tears upon her cheeks.

"Did some one scream?" asked Bertie gently.

"Yes, sir," answered the girl. "It was Miss Nellie, sir. It's her papa. He's been sick—very sick, and—and I'm afraid he's dead, sir. She's all alone, and—oh, sir, it is dreadful for her!"

"May not we see her?" asked Malcolm. "If there is anything we can do to assist her it would give us pleasure."

"If you only would, sir! Miss Nellie is so good and so young! Will you come this way?"

Bertie and Malcolm followed the little maid, and were shown into a back room of the neatly furnished house.

There, upon the bed a man lay, with every appearance of death upon his white, set face.

Over him a girl stood—a girl with soft brown hair and great grey eyes that seemed to travel right down to a man's heart and linger there.

She was not beautiful—that is, not what the world calls beautiful—but there was a trace of heavenly calm about her, as from sorrow, heavily borne, that was infinitely touching.

She was not weeping—only holding the cold hand in both her own, her face not less ghastly than that of the dead.

"He was all I had!" she kept repeating again and again, until the monotony became mournful as a sea-gull's call. "He was all I had! Oh, papa, what will become of your little Nellie now?"

She did not lift her eyes as the two men entered, and the small maid crept up and slipped her arms around the slender waist.

"Miss Nellie," she whispered, "don't you see the two gentlemen? They have come to help you. Won't you speak to them?"

The sweet grey eyes were raised then. "I beg your pardon—I did not hear you!" she said, simply. "He was all I had, and he has left me!"

She staggered slightly, and the maid drew her to a chair, without loosening the small fingers from the dead hand.

Malcolm went up to her and laid his hand upon the bowed head.

"Poor little girl!" he said, with tender sympathy. "Will you not try to think and tell us what we are to do for you? We are friends, who will help you if we can. Who was your father's physician?"



"Doctor Ellis. Oh, sir, you are very good to me! Perhaps you can tell me that he is not dead!"

There was the most heart-broken entreaty in her tone, but Malcolm shook his head sadly, while tears dimmed his gentle eyes.

"I am afraid there is no hope for that little one," he said, sorrowfully. "Have you no relatives, no friends, whom I can summon?"

"None. We were quite alone, papa and I. He has feared this for so long—so long—and he tried to make arrangements for me, but it was impossible. It was the worry, the constant sickening dread about me that—Oh, papa, papa! I cannot bear it—I cannot!"

She bowed her head upon the dead man's bosom, while the little maid sobbed silently, her face concealed by an apron.

"You must not give way like that, little one," said Malcolm, softly, speaking as he might have done to a child. "Would your papa have wished it? You should consult his desires now just as you did then."

"I know, sir—I know, and I am trying, indeed I am. But it is hard—oh, so very hard! If he could only have taken me with him!"

"Don't speak like that, child! It sounds so wretched and desolate! Try to talk to me now, and tell me what I am to do for you."

"I don't know, sir. I am so very ignorant and helpless. I am grateful—more grateful than I can say, but you see, sir, I have always hoped that things would be better with us. Last winter everything seemed to prosper. Papa was too ill to run his business, but he had this house, and we took in boarders. Everything went well, and he seemed to improve so much that I was quite happy for a time; but his summer came on the boarders began to leave, but the expenses were still heavy, and gradually it took all we had saved. Then his health began to fail again. I watched it, sir, knowing he was coming, feeling it hourly, yet unable to prevent it—unable to help him in any way. Oh, it was so terribly cruel! He was unable to obtain the medicines the doctor ordered, but he never lost hope. It was always 'Have courage, Nellie; to-morrow will bring a change.' Only yesterday he said it, and the change has come, sir—the change of death!"

She groaned in the exceeding bitterness of her spirit, but still not a tear came to cool the dull heat of her aching eyes.

"And you are all alone?" asked Malcolm, tenderly.

"All alone, sir."

"And—pardon me. You must not think me inquisitive, for my only desire is to help you. You have—no money?"

"Yes, sir, a little. There is something like two pounds, I think. But the rent is paid for the month, and there are some boarders coming to-morrow evening."

"Poor little thing! Why, child, you couldn't keep a boarding-house!"

"I am afraid not, sir, but there is nothing else to do. I have nowhere to go. There was only papa and me, and now—oh, heaven, pity me!"

She rocked herself to and fro in her abandonment to the terrible sorrow that had overtaken her, kissing again and again the unresponsive lips; then, quietly, Herbert lifted her, and, unresisted, carried her away.

He placed her upon a sofa in another room, and sat down beside her, taking her hand with unobtrusive respect.

"Nellie," he said, gently, "you are not much more than a child, and I am a man who has known such sorrow that I am aged beyond my years. Therefore, you must look upon me as old, and let me help you. Knowing the purity of my motives, your father would have approved it, I am quite sure. I am not going to offer you any charity, but a simple means of earning your own livelihood. Will you allow me to do that, Nellie?"

"Why should I not?" she asked, simply, and with the faith of a baby. "You and your friend are so good to me."

"That is right. I wish you not to distress yourself about anything. My friend and I will see that everything is arranged as it should be. You remain here until we decide what is best to

be done with you. Trust us as you trusted him, and know that Heaven will deal with us as we deal with you."

He pressed her hand gently and passed into the hall.

Bessie, the little maid, was there.

"Go to Miss Nellie," Staunton said, "and comfort her. We will attend to everything. Perhaps you can, without distressing her, make out a list for me of what is needed in the house. I will see that it is brought."

"How can I thank you, sir?"

"By going to her and making her cry if you can. That would be the greatest kindness you could do her now."

"I am afraid I can't, sir. She is always like that now. I have known her to lie outside his door all night on a mat, listening to him cough, the pain in her eyes terrible. But she was that brave no one would ever have suspected, if they had not seen her as I have. She says nothing, but her heart is breaking."

"You must try to interest her in something. Make her forget herself if you can. Don't take too much of the household care from her, and induce her to talk. Go now and do what you can, even as we shall do."

## CHAPTER XX.

"Miss NELLIE, the new boarders have come. And, oh, such a beautiful couple! The man is almost as handsome as that Mr. Staunton who has been so good to us; and the lady—oh, the lady is the most beautiful creature you ever saw, but with such a queer expression! Come to see them, Miss Nellie, won't you?"

It was the evening after the funeral, and everything relating to it had been removed from the kitchen girl's presence. In her simple black gown she sat alone there in the gathering shadows, when Bessie interrupted her.

"I think not," she answered, wearily.

"But, Miss Nellie, please do! After all I am only a servant, and they might not feel quite at home, you know."

The little, pale-faced mistress of the house arose dejectedly, and wearily followed her maid. She tapped lightly upon the door of the room, and opened it as a voice from the inside called:

"Come in!"

The man was standing in a careless attitude, but the woman had drawn herself up so coldly, so haughtily, that she seemed a princess rebuking the presumption of a peasant. Her lovely countenance wore a hard expression that seemed unnatural to it, and her small hand was tightly clenched.

Nellie was interested.

"I come to see if there is anything I can do to make you more comfortable," she said, gently.

"Nothing!" answered the man, promptly. "I wish to see the mistress of the house, that I may settle my bill for a week in advance. Will you tell her, please?"

"I am she, sir."

"You? I beg your pardon. Then it will be easily arranged."

A curious change was taking place in the woman. A soft light had come to the dark eyes, a tremulous sweetness to the crimson lips, that made her singularly lovely.

She twisted a pair of gloves which she had removed nervously.

"Have you—lived here long?" she asked of Nellie.

"Nearly a year, madam."

"And do you—know your—neighbours?"

"Very little, madam. I had the misfortune"—her voice breaking sadly—"to lose my father. The two young men in the house opposite have been kinder than I can tell you."

"In the house opposite?" stammered the woman, her dark eyes strangely brilliant.

"Yes, madam."

"Who are they?"

"Mr. Malcolm Carlton and Mr. Staunton."

The man quickly placed himself between the two ladies, ostensibly to return a handkerchief that had fallen to his companion.

"Be careful," he whispered, warningly.

He noticed that she was shivering from head to foot, and that her teeth chattered dully.

She stepped beyond him, and leaned against a bureau for support.

"You don't mean," she said, in a choked sort of way, "that—Mr. Carlton and B—Mr. Staunton live together?"

"Yes, madam. Do you know them?"

"By reputation, of course!" exclaimed the man, fearing the answer. "Will you have the kindness to send us some coffee by your servant?"

Feeling herself dismissed, Nellie bowed and withdrew.

The woman within threw herself face downwards upon the very couch upon which Herbert Staunton had laid Nellie.

She sobbed in the most heart-broken way, as though her spirit, weary of its boundary, were striving to break through its confines.

The man, in evident distress, watched her for a moment in profound silence; then placing a chair beside her, and himself upon it, he gently but forcibly placed his arms around her and drew her upon his bosom.

"Eden," he said, tenderly, "don't struggle, darling! I have no desire to obtrude my love upon you, but I cannot see you weep like that, knowing that I am the cause. Have some pity upon me!"

"Pity! What pity have you had upon me, Wilfred Gordon? You have done worse than destroy my life—you have crushed my heart, you will eventually ruin my soul; and you dignify the cause of your hideous act with the name of love! Oh, Heaven! I cannot, cannot bear it! Just across there, separated from me by a little wall, are my brother and my husband, and yet your brutality keeps me from them. I hate you! I loathe you!"

"Eden, child, how unjust you are! Think, dear! Were I to open my arms and tell you that my great love has taught me self-sacrifice, my darling, would you go there to them? Would you go to your brother and to Herbert Staunton, and say to them, 'It is I, Eden, returned to you again!'"

Her teeth chattered loudly; every nerve seemed vibrating beneath her terrible excitement.

(To be continued.)

## FIRES UNSEEN.

### CHAPTER X.—(continued.)

CHURCHILL PENANCE went unflinchingly away, and back into the dark house turned Zitella, for she it was who had assumed the name of Inez Valdez, her wretched maid, and, success fully, passed herself off as Pedro's daughter-in-law.

So successful, indeed, had been Zitella's daring scheme that the purblind, avicious old man only wondered that he had ever sent such a useful a person as this daughter-in-law, who had so many clever ways of making money.

Old Pedro had boasted himself of his own unscrupulousness and cunning many a day; but now he told himself that his exploits were as child's play compared to what Inez could do; and between them the two plucked many an unwary pigeon.

If Pedro had discovered the fraud which Zitella had practised on him it would not have made any difference now, for with her beauty and her unscrupulousness the girl was simply worth her weight in gold.

Zitella knew this, and a dozen times a day she congratulated herself on the idea of having passed herself off as Inez Valdez.

In coming to Pedro Valdez she had acted on an impulse; she hardly knew why. But before long she told herself it had been a wise course.

Old Pedro would be worth robbing when, like others, he had served his purpose.

But, now, as Zitella turned into the dark house, it seemed to her that the fates were conspiring to overthrow her unscrupulous plans.

Here was not a nervous or timid nature. She never imagined evil or met misfortune half way; but now her hands were trembling, her brow cold and damp with terror, her brain throbbled with the intelligence which Churchill Penance conveyed to her.

Valentine Eyre was in Rio San Vopez—in the town which was ringing with the fame she had acquired as a dancer.

Even in this Zitella had been attended with the most extraordinary good fortune. She had dropped into the place of a celebrated dancer who had suddenly died in Madrid.

Zitella had taken the girl's name on the stage, and as her skill in dancing was just as marvellous as that of her predecessor, it was only the theatrical company by whom she was engaged that ever knew the difference.

Like Isidora in face and form, only more refined, Zitella continued to draw even greater crowds to watch her performances. Her fame had increased nightly, and also her wealth, for bouquets, shielded with diamonds, were flung at her feet, and the people of Madrid said that Isidora grew more bewitching with every hour.

The real Isidora had enjoyed the reputation of being as virtuous as she was lovely and clever; and Zitella was politic enough not to imperil the good name which was part of her success by any rash act.

So far from encouraging lovers, no matter how rich they might be, she wrapped herself up in a sphinx-like mystery, which made her more than ever an object of curiosity and all-devouring admiration.

In Madrid, Zitella, or rather Isidora, (for by that name the adventuress was best known), had never been identified with old Pedro Valdez. But when the season was over in the gay capital, the two, intent on adding more and more to their gains, had determined to visit the country towns.

They came in the course of a successful tour to Rio San Vopez, whither the dancer Isidora's fame had preceded her. But here it suddenly seemed to Zitella as if her splendid luck was about to fail her at last.

That morning she had in the market-place narrowly escaped falling a victim to the passionate vengeance of Hermann, her gipsy lover.

Now she heard that Valentine Eyre was in the town; and of the two whom she had wronged she feared him most.

She knew something of what love turned to hatred is capable. She had no hope of being able to blind Valentine with falsehoods did he cross her path now; and her heart sickened within her as she thought that, in his just anger, he might have her arrested for the robberies which she had committed on Lady Fitzroy.

For the discovery of her imposition about the Czervas title she had not a thought or a fear. She did not think such a fraud would be punishable by law.

Zitella had but one thought now—to leave Rio San Vopez at once.

By her words to Churchill Penance she had greatly lessened the danger of discovery; but she must not remain any longer in the same town which sheltered the man she had so deeply wronged. Neither must she appear in public to-night; it would be too great a risk.

She had just come from her rehearsals at the theatre, (the story told to Churchill about the pupils was, of course, a falsehood); but she would go back there at once, see the manager, and make some good excuse for her non-appearance that night.

She was afraid to absent herself without leave or some explanation, for the prizes which she drew as Isidora were not to be lightly lost.

"I have made one hopeless mistake in my life; I do not want to make another," said Zitella to herself, thinking of her treatment of

Hugo Brand, who, if she had waited a little while, would have been such a brilliant prize.

It was bitter to this clever, unscrupulous woman to think that by a false move she should have lost for ever the chance of brilliant rank and wealth.

Having shrouded her face from all fear of recognition Zitella set off to the theatre; but, to her great vexation, she found the manager obdurate. He would make no allowances, listen to no excuses. She must appear in public that night, or leave the theatre altogether.

For the first time Zitella encountered a will stronger than her own. She found, too, that in taking Isidora's name and fame she had taken some secret burden of guilt which gave the manager a power over her that she could not withstand.

She did not know what the secret was, for his threats were vague; but she saw that, whatever the danger to herself, she must appear in the theatre to-night.

When she had thought it over she preferred to run the risk of meeting Valentine Eyre than offend the manager, who had, it seemed, the power to ruin her career by a word.

"After all," she said to herself, "except in the case of Hugo, my luck has never failed me yet. I will trust to it once more!"

## CHAPTER XI.

VALENTINE EYRE waited breakfast for a full hour, and then, finding that Churchill did not come, he ordered some fresh coffee to be made, after which, feeling rather angry with his friend, he went out for a solitary stroll in the environs of Rio San Vopez, where during the course of the day his wanderings brought him to a forest, the features of which brought back, with painful distinctness, the memory of his first meeting with Zitella; and from thinking of the past there seemed to spring up in his mind a strong provision that the hour of his vengeance was drawing near.

Returning to his abode about sunset, Valentine learned from Martin, his valet, that during his absence Churchill Penance had been in and gone out again, leaving word that he would dine at the Casino, and go afterwards to a play in which a celebrated dancing-girl from Madrid had been advertised to appear between the acts.

Valentine Eyre received the message with some impatience and an unaccountable doubt of its truth, though there was no reason why his friend should not go to the play did he feel inclined to do. Still, Valentine felt that this was an excuse; and, with an affectation of carelessness, he inquired of the man if Churchill Penance had made any mention of the pocket-book whose loss had so disturbed him in the morning.

"No, sir," replied the valet, promptly. "Mr. Penance didn't make mention of no book, sir; but he did say as 'ow he 'oped you would not put yourself out for him on any account, and he didn't think as 'ow the play would be much, but he'd come away when he had had enough of it."

"I think I will go to the play too," said Valentine to himself when the valet had withdrawn, "and, by Jove! it would not be a bad idea to hunt Master Churchill up at this place where he is going to dine. I like the boy, and am resolved to keep him out of trouble if I can."

But though Valentine Eyre carried out his programme, no Churchill Penance did he find. He dined by himself, and then adjourned to the theatre to hear on all sides murmurs of the dancing girl from Madrid, whose fame had preceded her to Rio San Vopez.

The house was well-nigh full as Valentine entered; but though many a lustrous dark eye met his glance, there was no sign of Churchill Penance. He felt a little hurt and angry in the suspicion that his friend had treated him with want of confidence; but after a few moments of hesitation, he decided

to wait at least for the first part of the performance, and so he dropped into his seat, prepared to look on himself as a martyr to friendship.

The curtain went up, revealing an indifferently appointed stage, and the famous dancing girl, who was greeted with a perfect thunder of applause, which brought a contemptuous smile to the lips of Valentine Eyre, who was too indifferent to look at the object of this enthusiasm.

The moment the curtain gave tokens of rising he had leaned back in his seat and actually closed his eyes, in which position he remained while burst after burst of applause broke forth around him, until at length he heard a voice exclaim beside him in Spanish,—

"Great Heaven! what dancing, and how lovely she is! Such eyes, such hair, such grace!"

Then, half in contempt, half-curious, to see if these encomiums were deserved, Valentine opened his eyes and looked towards the stage to see there Zitella, his false love!

He sprang out of his seat, and there broke from his lips a gasping cry of rage and pain, which was, however, utterly lost in the fresh plaudits which some indescribably graceful turn of Zitella's elicited from the excited audience; and so Valentine Eyre sank back in his seat, feeling for a while stricken and stunned in the shock of the moment for which he had waited and thirsted so long.

Zitella did not see him, or bold, hardened as she was she could not have danced on. Had her glance lighted on that of Valentine Eyre and seen the deadly purpose which gleamed from his eyes she must have been stricken down; but, though disturbed by anxious thoughts of him, she was utterly unconscious of his presence, and every movement of her exquisite form drew louder and yet louder acclamations from every part of the house, until it seemed as if the roof would be rent in twain.

At last the curtain fell, and then little jets of flame shot up all over the house, but they fell on one empty seat in the stalls; and as Zitella passed before the footlights and gathered up the jewelled bouquets which were flung to her, her wronged, discarded lover was waiting outside in the shadow of the portico, wrapped in a long dark cloak, and fingering with nervous hands the hilt of the dagger which he had carried with him ever since the day on which he found himself betrayed; and the desire for revenge working on his fiery Spanish blood became a mania, until he believed that Zitella's life would be but a small price for her falseness, and that in taking it he was committing a just and virtuous deed.

He had long to wait, but the delay did not cool his blood, nor did he grudge the time, though the minutes went so slowly by, for now he was sure of his revenge, and the anticipation was not the least part of its sweetness.

At length, what he had been waiting for arrived, for Zitella, cloaked and hooded, appeared in the portico, and Valentine, as he peered out of his dark corner, heard her say in Spanish to those who surrounded her footsteps,—

"Thank you, I require no assistance. I prefer to find my own way home."

Then her train of worshippers fell back, and drawing her cloak closely round her slender figure Zitella left the building alone.

With swift, silent footsteps she passed from that street into another and a darker, and from the way in which she walked, or rather fled along, it would seem that she feared pursuit, but she never once turned to look until Valentine was close upon her with the dagger in his hand, and then faltering in his purpose, his voice broke forth in this horrified cry,—

"Great Heaven! what is this thing I would do!"

The spectre of his deed had risen before him and stayed his hand, and when Zitella turned to look at him he was trembling like a coward, while great drops of sweat gathered on his brow.



A moment their eyes met, and in her guilty terror Zitella almost gave up herself for lost. She looked round, but saw no aid, and her limbs seemed stricken powerless; then her glance travelled back to the gleaming blade in Valentine's hand, and from that to his eyes, lurid now with fires of fierce passion, and she saw that though he had faltered for a moment she must expect no mercy at his hands.

But her courage did not altogether forsake her, and though her limbs and tongue seemed powerless, her brain was as keen as ever; and knowing that she must have time to think she feigned a swoon and sank to the pavement at the feet of the man she had cheated and betrayed, but who would not, as her woman's instincts told her, either hurt or abandon her in this plight.

Valentine bent over the prostrate form and looked into the face, which was like veined marble. He told himself that she had slain his love, and forfeited all claim to mercy; that he hated and loathed her, and that it would be a just deed were he to plunge the dagger in her heart; but this did not lessen her beauty or her power over him. And still he lingered, bending over her proclaiming his misery, and uttering aloud the wild hope that there might have been some mistake, until at length he raised Zitella, and bore her a few paces in his arms, until he turned into a sort of blind alley, in which there was barely enough light to show him when he looked close that Zitella had opened her eyes.

"Valentine, oh, my love!" she murmured. Then the tender tones changed to a cry of anger and pain, and frantically the girl struggled in his tightening arms, calling on Heaven and the Holy Virgin to let her free from this false traitor who had wrecked her life, and would now follow her with persecutions.

"Traitor!" echoed Valentine, with angry bitterness. "It is I who have been betrayed!" But his arms tightened more and more firmly until, as if through sheer exhaustion, her futile struggles ceased.

"Zitella," he asked at length, "why did you play me false? If you have any truth in you, give the true reason now."

The girl replied with a scornful laugh, and Valentine felt beneath her arm the hard beating of her heart, and heard her quick panting breath. Then, as the echoes of her laughter died away, she exclaimed angrily,—

"How dare you question me? How dare you speak of truth!—you, who are one mass of falsehood, who deceived me with lies from the beginning?"

The hot blood mounted up into Valentine's cheek, and his pulses throbbed with mingled relief and terror; but he kept silence while Zitella thought what false charge she could bring against him that would be a sufficient excuse for her treachery. But Valentine himself put the words into her mouth.

"Zitella," he said, "some meddling person told you of my wife. But what wrong was there to you? I never loved her as I loved you; but it was not my fault that she was not happy; it was not my fault that she died alone, and untended by me, her husband, who only arrived in time to stand above her grave."

From these words Zitella inferred that Valentine knew nothing of her treachery to Lady Fitzroy, and that, at least as far as he was concerned, her fraud about her name and birth was still a secret. His mind, she could plainly see, was wholly occupied with thoughts of his love for her, and her falsehood towards himself, and for that she was desperately resolved she would make some satisfactory explanation. That this man was still as wildly infatuated with her as ever she had no longer a doubt. It would be easy to bring him back to her feet and make him the slave of her will once more; but this she had no desire to do. Her only wish was to avert his anger, and get away scot free once and for ever.

She was silent for a moment, then she suddenly exclaimed, in hard, scoffing tones,—

"Your wife was not in that grave, Valentine Eyre!"

"Good Heaven, what do you mean?"

Zitella averted her face for a few moments, then went on, with evident horror in her tones,—

"I mean this. That your wretched wife, weary of your hatred and cruelty, and unable to die, sought the only means of escape which was open to her. She fled from your house, leaving behind her those who were bribed by word and deed to make all appear as if she were dead and buried."

A terrible silence followed these words; but at length Valentine broke from the trance of horror which seemed to bind him, and exclaimed aloud,—

"Great Heaven, I cannot believe this. It cannot be true!"

"It is true," replied Zitella, calmly, for she felt now that, whatever the next move might be, the game was all in her own hands.

"Your proof!" asked Valentine, hoarsely, "Give me your proof?"

"I have no proof," replied Zitella, "beyond my mere word. But what more can you want? Do you think," she said, bitterly, "that I would have given you up, and shattered all my life's happiness for less than this?" Here she began to speak in a thick, hurried way, as if sobs she could not control were rising in her throat. She dwelt on the anguish and shame, the shock which was hers, when Mrs. Eyre revealed herself to her suddenly one night at Lady Fitzroy's house in London. She was alone when the cruel blow had fallen on her, for her hostess and Blanche Hastings had gone to a party. "I would not go in your absence," said Zitella, in a way that wrung a cry and a groan from her listener's heart. "I was sitting alone," she continued, "when they told me a person was waiting who would see me. Then Mrs. Eyre came in, and, when she had left me, there was only room in my crushed heart for one thought, and that was flight. To get back to my native land, away from all who had ever known me, was my desire. Before Lady Fitzroy and Blanche had returned I had made my plans, and was already on my way to Spain."

To all this Valentine listened with feelings which no words can describe. He had no suspicion of Zitella's truth. All his anger was removed from her and centred on the wife who had tricked and cheated him with such cruel, such incomprehensible falsehood. He could not fathom the motives which had induced Celia to act in such a way; but, in these moments of grief and passion, he had not the smallest doubt that she had really revealed herself to Zitella.

"And she lives still?" he asked at last, in cold, dreary, hopeless tones.

A long silence followed this question. Zitella could not make up her mind what answer to make. Should she tell Valentine that his wife was dead, he would expect her to prove her love for him by forgiving him, and becoming Mrs. Eyre.

"If I refuse to do this," thought Zitella to herself, "he will still linger near me and cripple my actions, and there will be a hundred things to awaken his suspicions then. Though he is rich I almost hate him, and he would not be worth the trouble I should have from his fierce jealousy. No! If I have to give up all hope of identifying myself as the lawful wife of him whom I married as Hugo Brand, I think that foolish young Englishman, who since this morning has been ready to die for me, would be a far better prize."

Zitella had closed her eyes, feigning a return of her swoon, as these swift thoughts passed through her mind; but when Valentine spoke again, imploring her, for Heaven's sake, to answer his question, she raised her head, saying, in a tone that seemed fraught with misery,—

"Yes, Heaven help us both, my poor Valentine! Your wife lives still to be an insuperable barrier between us!"

"She shall not be. I swear she shall not!" cried Valentine.

His voice was harsh and broken with frenzy; and clasping Zitella closer in his arms, he

covered her face with frantic kisses, between which he repeated again and again the assurance that nothing in life or death should come between them.

Zitella lay still and motionless, with closed eyes, as if she was dead to all feeling. This passionate outpouring of her lover's heart gratified her cruel lust for homage.

It was a triumph that she could not forego; but by-and-by she remembered that it was dangerous, and rousing herself she exclaimed, with a splendid affectation of reproach and disdain,—

"And you are the man I have loved and trusted—you, who have done me and another a most bitter wrong, would now shrink from the only atonement you can make."

"Zitella I call Heaven to witness, I did you no wilful wrong. Oh, Heaven! you love me!"

Zitella raised her hand entreatingly.

"Hush!" she said, in solemn tones. "Do not invoke Heaven's vengeance or tempt me to forget that you have a wife, and that I am a Czarvas."

"Oh, good heavens!" gasped Valentine; and then he bowed his head, and his whole frame seemed shaken with the fierce, dry sobs which broke from him. Then his hands unclasped themselves, and the dagger, which he had been holding all this time, dropped to the pavement with a sound that made Zitella realise more clearly the risk she had run; and then, starting and shivering, she bade Valentine let her go.

"By Heaven I will not!" cried Valentine. "I have no love but you—no wife! Celia has wronged and deceived me shamefully. She deserves no consideration at my hands."

And he proceeded to pour forth for Zitella a passionate recital of his marriage with Celia De Nunsz and its unhappy results.

The girl heard him to the end, and then said in sorrowful, gentle tones,—

"I do not wish to be unkind; and, alas! I destroy my own happiness; but in all this I see that you, and you only, have been to blame. Your wife, though mistaken in some of her actions, has been an angel of goodness, and Heaven will surely punish you if you do not make her and your children all possible reparation."

"What shall I do!" asked Valentine, in sullen misery; and eagerly Zitella replied,—

"Ah! now you are true to yourself, and my high noble ideal! But what can you do? Only this, return to England, and seek out your poor unhappy wife. Do not rest until you have found her, and then all will be well, for a true woman's forgiveness is equal to her love."

"I will not return to England!" replied Valentine, passionately. "Zitella, oh, my love—my love! You cannot be so cruel, so—"

"Hush!" interrupted the girl, and there was the purity of an angel in her voice and gestures, "not another word. Remember, that to speak to me of love is deadly sin!"

Valentine continued to plead and argue, but all to no purpose; then he suddenly said that it was impossible that he could return to England. And forthwith he began to narrate the story told on his father's deathbed, and to explain that the finding of his brother Hermann was a charge he could not neglect.

Zitella listened, and her heart beat wildly, because the web of destiny seemed thickening so strongly around her; for she felt quite sure that this Hermann was the gipsy to whom she had been betrothed in her childhood, and who was at this moment thirsting for vengeance on her.

That morning Hermann had crossed her path, and his anger had only been averted by the brave intervention of Churchill Penance. By himself she had nothing serious to fear from Hermann, for she could always deceive and disarm him with some well-concocted lie of having been carried off against her will by Valentine Eyre, but should the two men meet she was undone. She resolved, however,

that if she could help it they should not meet.

She shuddered, resolving that the morning light should find her fled from Rio-San-Vegas. And then she said aloud that she could give him a clue to the discovery of Hermann, of whom she had heard not long ago from the extreme north of Spain; but she advised Valentine to abandon the search, for Hermann was a wild, bad man, who would not be grateful for kindness.

"I must do him justice," replied Valentine. "But, oh! Zitelia, let us not speak of him, but of ourselves. When am I to see you again?"

"Never after to-night!" said Zitelia. "Oh, Valentine, how can you hope it? Do not make it harder for me," and she sighed piteously. "My love I cannot help, but I can remember that I am a Czarvas, and if you care for me you will prove it by leaving this place to-morrow."

"And you, Zitelia, how can I bear to think of you as I saw you to-night? Oh! my dear love, I cannot. You must promise me that you will dance no more in public."

"Then I should starve," replied the girl, bitterly. "And not only I but the poor old man whom I support. Ah! you must not chide me in that jealous frenzy, Valentine, for poor old pere is almost ninety, and is happy in the belief that I am his daughter, whom I resemble closely. The poor soul and I were friends, and when she died her poor, doting old father would have been desolate if I had not taken care of him."

"Heaven bless you, darling!" said Valentine, brokenly, "but this dancing must end from to-night. I will provide for you and the old man."

"Oh! Valentine, you forget!" sobbed Zitelia. "Oh! if you really respect me let me go now. Do not seek to find out my dwelling; it would be too great a temptation, and there is less danger for me from the dark streets than from your society."

"I swear," said Valentine, "that if you will confide to me your address I will do no more than communicate with you through my lawyer."

And so, after a few minutes' hesitation, Zitelia furnished her lover with the name and number of a street which were both fictitious, and a moment later she had slipped from his arms, and was gliding swiftly through the dark deserted streets.

She had escaped for this once, but the escape was narrow, and she did not feel at all secure.

## CHAPTER XII.

VALENTINE stood still in the dark narrow alley, listening to the last sound of Zitelia's vanishing footsteps. His impulse had been and was still to follow her from a distance and see her enter her home; but the remembrance of her parting words restrained him, for they had been a wild plea that he would prove his love and his truth by leaving her in peace.

"You make it harder than death for me," Zitelia had whispered, and Valentine could not now be disloyal to the promise which he had made, because he loved Zitelia ten thousand times more for the purity and womanly pride, in which he believed with all his heart.

He thought he heard a sound behind him as he stood there of a slow, cautious movement, and looked anxiously round, but saw nothing. Then, instead of quitting this strange refuge, he stood still, and once more plunged into thoughts of Zitelia until feeling became too much for him and he exclaimed aloud—

"My darling! My pearl beyond price or compare, who would ask to give you up? Oh my love! it is too—"

Suddenly the passionate, despairing tones changed to a hoarse, strangled cry of physical pain.

"Oh! Heaven!"

The words ended in a horrible gurgling sound, as Valentine Eyre fell forward, pierced

in the darkness, with his own dagger, and by the hand of Hermann, who had tracked both Zitelia and Valentine from the door of the theatre.

"He is my brother; but he has robbed me and deserves his fate," said the gipsy to himself, as the heavy fall was succeeded by silence, and fearing nothing he bent down and pressed his hand over the heart of his victim to see if life was yet extinct.

When a few faint throbs responded to the touch of his fingers Hermann seemed puzzled to know what to do; and it was not brotherly feeling alone which restrained him from plunging the dagger a second time in the body of his victim.

"He has robbed me of my love!" he muttered, savagely; "but if I spare his life I may have a better revenge," and then rising he went a few cautious steps, feeling with his hand along the wall until he came to a window.

Here Hermann knocked significantly three times, and was answered by the opening of the window, and a voice, which asked some questions in a few hurried whispers. After which a short colloquy ensued, which ended in the opening of the door, and the appearance in the street of two persons, who assisted Hermann to carry the wounded man indoors.

"It is lucky that it happened here," remarked one of them, as they bore the body through a secret trapdoor and down a long flight of steps into an underground room which no ray of natural light ever pierced.

This house was in the possession of a gang of desperadoes, who were thieves on shore and smugglers on the sea, and Hermann knew that in their hands Valentine Eyre was safe; for if he lived this room would be a prison for him, and if he died there was a subterranean passage by which his body could be removed and flung into the sea.

One of the gang, who was something of a surgeon, attended to Valentine, and having rifled his pockets and divided between them the contents, with his watch and jewellery, the villains left their unconscious victim, and went upstairs to pass the night in drinking and card-playing.

The evening which ended so tragically for Valentine Eyre was full of disappointments for Churchill Penance.

As the reward of his devotion in the morning he had looked forward to an evening in the society of the beautiful Inez; and with his heart rubbing before him he had gone to the house of the old Spaniard, who told him, grumblingly, that his daughter had got a headache, and gone to bed.

"Women are all the same," muttered the old man; "Inez does not care for my company, and so she leaves me alone; for, of course," he added, plaintively, "I can't expect that you will stay and cheer me up a bit."

"I will spend an hour or two with you," replied Churchill, who guessed that Inez was out, and not lying down upstairs, as her father-in-law believed.

"But my beautiful darling," thought the young man, fondly, "will not be allowed to work when once I have won her love!" and then, for thanks of Inez, Churchill Penance sat down and began to play cards with old Pedro Valdez, whom he instinctively disliked and mistrusted.

He played on and on in the hope that the object of his thoughts would return and reward him with a whispered good-night and a hand clasp in the passage; and when Pedro had won all his money the young man cheerfully asked and lost his rings and watch, which pointed to the hour of midnight before he rose up and turned himself away.

The wine which the young man had drunk during the evening had penetrated to his brain and left him capable but of these thoughts—that life would not be worth living without Inez and that to-morrow he should ask her to be his wife, and so set her free from her miserable existence.

His head was still clear enough to enable

him to see that Pedro Valdez would not be a desirable connection, but he resolved to provide the old man with such comforts that he would never wish to leave his native land. And so thinking, Churchill Penance reached his abode, from which, to his surprise, he found Valentine Eyre absent; but on this account the young man was not much troubled, for Inez's hints had estranged him so far from his friend that he resolved they two should part company as soon as possible.

However, when on rising the following morning Churchill learned from his friend's valet that his master was still absent the young man began to feel rather puzzled and anxious; but so selfish is love that by the time breakfast was over his thoughts had once more flown to Inez, and thinking every moment that kept him apart from her, an hour he set out to the house of Pedro Valdez.

On entering Churchill Penance found the old man alone, and in a state of rage and misery beyond all description. He tore his long grey hair and beat his hands on his breast, weeping and raving like a maniac; then showing Churchill rifled chests and coffers he told the young man an incoherent tale of how his daughter-in-law had come in on him at a late hour on the previous night, and finding him engaged in counting his money, had given him some wine, which must have contained a heavy drug, for immediately on drinking it he had fallen asleep and had not wakened until morning, when he found that his daughter-in-law had robbed him of all he possessed.

The old man's tale, though wild and incoherent, had all the appearance of truth, but in spite of his tears and despairing gestures Churchill refused to believe him.

Inez's beautiful face, her innocence, her gentle words, rose up before the young man's memory, and forbade him to believe that she could be guilty of such a wicked and unscrupulous act as that which had been laid to her charge; and though the appearance of the old Spaniard's money-chests bore witness to the fact that some thief had been there, Churchill thought that the old man's losses had maddened him, and so he must not be blamed for suspecting the first person who came into his head; but when he spoke of this Pedro stamped on the floor and shrieked with rage.

"I tell you it was my daughter-in-law who robbed me!" he cried. "Oh, my money! my money!" and he flung himself down on the empty chest, shrieking with renewed violence. "My daughter-in-law robbed me, my friend of a daughter-in-law!"

"Pese, old man. She who robbed you was not your daughter-in-law," broke in a sudden strange voice from the doorway of the room, and, turning, Churchill beheld the gipsy man from whom he had repaid Inez on the previous day; but now that the man no longer wore his native costume but a suit of English make and fashion, Churchill was struck by the extraordinary likeness which this new-comer bore to Valentine Eyre, for in feature, height, and complexion, it seemed that the two men were exactly the same. Then springing towards Hermann, Churchill exclaimed, triumphantly—

"I knew it was not Inez. But now forget that you owe me any grudge, on account of yesterday, and say who committed this foul act, and you will be well rewarded!"

He spoke in English; but Hermann, however he had attained this knowledge, was familiar with the language, for he scowled darkly as he replied—

"I do not mean to forget the grudge I owe you; but I owe her a greater one, and I tell you now that it was she who robbed this old man, whose daughter-in-law she pretends to be."

Churchill Penance heard thus far, then sprang forward, his fists clenched, his eyes blazing with anger, that made him ready to crush the life out of him who had dared to utter falsehoods against his love.



"Scoundrel!" he hissed forth, "of whom do you dare to speak?"

But Hermann was nothing daunted by the young man's fury, and replied with unflinching calm,—

"I defy you to call me a scoundrel against I have spoken nothing but the truth of Zetella, who is no more Inez Valdez than you are. This old man's daughter-in-law is a maid in England, and Zetella has taken her place here in her father-in-law's home."

"How do you know all this?" asked Churchill, still incredulous, and ready to fight to the death for the honor of her he loved.

"I know it," replied Hermann, readily. "Because I have dogged Zetella's footsteps. She was a gipsy and betrothed to me, but she sold me for an Englishman, called Valentine Eyre, and it was with him that she left this town last night, having robbed that old man, and Hermann concluded his speech by pointing to the proaching form of the miserable old man, who had now entirely succumbed to his wiles, and, huddled up on the floor, was sobbing like a child for the loss of his beloved money."

But Churchill had no pity now for this aged grief; his nature seemed withered, and he was ready to oppose everyone and everything. So with a bitter laugh and a few scornful words to the miserable old man he turned and left the house, leaving in his heart to be revenged on the girl who had sold him, and on the false friend whose life he had once saved.

In this bitter mood the young man returned to his lodgings, and when he heard that Valentine Eyre was still absent, he needed no further proof of his treachery. Strange to say, it never entered into his head that in carrying off the girl whom he had known and loved before Valentine Eyre had done his friend no wrong, for calm thought was not much in Churchill's line. He only knew that yesterday he had fallen madly in love with the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and to-day he had lost her. He looked on Valentine Eyre as the cause of his loss, and, alone, in the presence of his friend's servant, he swore to take revenge. But the man was stout in the defence of his master, and replied, gravely,—

"I don't believe, sir, from what I know of the past, that my master would go away like this with Miss Gwynne. It's more likely, after the harmless tricks he played him when they were going to be married, that he'd refuse to have anything to say to her. It's my belief that there's been foul play somewhere, and I don't go back to England until I have found my master."

But here Churchill refused to listen to any further mention of Valentine Eyre, of whom he reiterated his opinion in the very strongest language possible; and within the next few hours he had taken his departure from the town of Rio San Vago, never to enter it again.

## CHAPTER XIII.

A few years later Churchill Penance went to Florence.

He had been drawn thither by reports of a woman whose marvellous beauty was taking the whole city by storm, and though the young Englishman heard her spoken of as a lady of rank and boundless wealth, the description which he received of her personal appearance was that of Inez Valdez, for whom his love had not yet died out.

So he went to Florence, and there, as fate would have it, met with an old friend who at once offered him an introduction to the house of the latest Florentine notoriety, a beautiful Hungarian, whose father's unjustly confiscated estates had been restored to her, and who had been crowned a Countess in her own right—a wild story, which was never questioned by anyone who had once seen the lovely heroine,

of it; for as Churchill learned from his friend, the Countess Czaryas charmed men and women alike, so that all were ready to fall down at her feet and worship her.

So Churchill went to the temple of this goddess, and found, as he had expected, Inez Valdez.

The blood receded from his cheek as he stood before her among throngs of distinguished guests, and his heart seemed for several moments to cease to beat; but she received him with a smile, in which there was no trace of fear or guilt. She even pressed his hand, thereby making him an object of envy to the assembled guests, and breathed, in a brief passionate whisper, the assurance that this was a moment for which she had hungered through months which seemed like years; and then turning to the man who had introduced Churchill, she thanked him most warmly for having restored to her such a dear friend as Mr. Penance.

Later on, as she flayed by Zetella whispered in Churchill's ear that he must remain until "these people," with an impatient wave of her hand, had departed, and then if he still took any interest in her she would relate to him all the sorrow and vicissitudes through which she had gone since their last meeting. And Churchill, though he hated himself for his weakness, remained, and that night while half Florence talked angrily of the inconsequence-looking young Englishman, to whom the Countess, cold to all others, had been so gracious, Churchill sat at Zetella's feet and told her tale.

She began at the beginning, and told it all with an appearance of candour which would have misled one less truthful than her listener.

Yes, Hermann, the gipsy, had been her playmate in childhood, and their elders had betrothed them, and then Valentine Eyre had come by and carried her off to England and educated her, and, out of gratitude, she had been ready to marry him, until she discovered that the marriage would only be an empty form, for Valentine Eyre had a wife alive; and when she, poor innocent Zetella, learned this, she had taken advantage of her false lover's absence to escape to her native land, and on the way she had met a widow called Inez Valdez, who bore a very strong resemblance to herself.

"And so," said Zetella, weeping, "when poor Inez died on the voyage, having confided to me every particular of her life story, I, desolate and penniless, thought it no harm to pass myself off as the daughter-in-law of old Pedro Valdez; and only for Valentine Eyre I should probably be with him now. But when I heard from you that that false villain was in Rio San Vago I determined, rather than fall into his unscrupulous hands, to go forth once more upon the world. And so, knowing that one of the ladies whose children I taught, was leaving in haste for Italy, and wanted a maid, I went to her and offered my services, which were immediately accepted, and so before sunset that evening we were out of the town."

"Some day," continued Zetella, "I will introduce you to that lady, who is now in England, and she will tell you how I remained with her until an accident brought me under the notice of a Hungarian prince, who was instrumental in restoring to me the title and lands of which my father had been unjustly deprived."

After this there remained, not a doubt in Churchill's mind of Zetella's truth. That part of her life which had been spent in London was all unknown to him. As she named Churchill Penance, had been occupied with other matters. He was ready to tell himself for having ever doubted her; but she only atonement he could make her to love her more madly than ever man had loved a woman.

So, while away in England, poor Mrs. Penance waited in vain for a line from her son. Churchill was waiting all his substance in magnificent presents to Zetella, who never by any chance alluded to the fact that she had

received from some unknown donor a set of diamonds which an empress might have hesitated to purchase; but though she never alluded to the jewels or wore them, she had a way, when they were alone, of casting Churchill a poor, toothy grin, and smiling him lovingly, which made the young man feel sure that she knew from whom the costly presents had come.

But though he loved so madly Churchill was not happy, for after the first gust of tenderness in their unexpected reunion was over, Zetella was cold to him as to all the rest.

She allowed him to be alone with her, and to be at her feet pouring out his heart in praises of her beauty; but whenever he hinted at marriage she became cold as ice at once, and then the young man would be sent away full of miserable, jealous doubts and fears, but feeling more than anything else that he had offended his love beyond all hope of forgiveness.

One night the lovely Countess Czaryas sat alone in her favourite room, in which only the dimmest lights were burning beneath amber shades.

The Countess herself was in *dehabille*; her exquisite form was enveloped in a loose wrapper of white cashmere, her hair was lying unloosened on her shoulders; her face was white; her red and swollen eyelids gave such evidence of long and violent weeping, that she laughed acily as she looked into the small hand-mirror on the table by her side.

"I could almost hate myself," she muttered. "Look such a miserable, contemptible object. Oh! if there are any women who ever really weep what fools they must be! But this temporary disfigurement!"

Suddenly Zetella paused, dropped the mirror, and caught up her daintily-embroidered handkerchief. There was a step in the corridor outside—the swift, joyous tread of a man hastening to the side of the woman he adores.

Zetella drew a quick breath, which showed that she was not altogether devoid of fear, and threw herself forward on the arms of her chair as if in the abandonment of some insoluble grief; then, as the door opened and the visitor entered, hence, passionate sobbing broke from her lips.

In a moment Churchill Penance was at her side. He was kneeling by her chair and drawing her into his embrace—was covering the hands which veiled her face with passionate kisses.

For a while she yielded passively, as if her grief were too violent for any other thought; then, as if suddenly remembering her position, she shook away from him, and revealing her white, grief-stained face for one moment, averted the next, exclaiming, in choking tones,—

"And you, too, take advantage of my helpless womanhood to insult me. Oh, what shall I do—where turn to find a friend?"

"Zetella!" exclaimed Churchill, in accents of the most profound astonishment and reproach. "I thank you—I take advantage of you! What do you mean?"

"Oh! I am mad!" she sobbed, hysterically. "Do not blame me—do not question me; only go and leave me to my fate!"

"Now you are mad when you wrong me so," cried Churchill. "Oh, my darling! unless you drive me away from you I will not leave you." And then, seizing her hand, trembling hands in his, he covered them once more with kisses, and poured forth all his heart and brought her in one fevered breath to confide in him the cause of her grief; but it was not until he had clasped his rope, and communicated her with the sternness of a master, that Zetella would speak. Then, with every appearance of terror, she sobbed forth,—

"It is that wicked, unscrupulous Valentine Eyre. He has pursued me, and threatened to ruin me with all my friends. And oh! what shall I do, for he has neither conscience nor fear, and has stamped up grout of his story which the world cannot but believe, because, alas! I have no witness against him but my word."



["MY MONEY! MY MONEY!" SHRIEKED PIERRO VALDEZ, FLINGING HIMSELF DOWNS ON THE CHEST.]

And Zitella sank down once more, weeping and sobbing more bitterly than before; but Churchill sprang to his feet, almost rejoicing that the hour had come in which he could settle his long-owed score with Valentine Eyre. But when he spoke loudly of avenging Zitella without delay she only sobbed more piteously, and entreated—nay, commanded—that he would not go to Valentine Eyre.

"He will take your life," she wailed, "and then I shall have lost my only true friend; for how can I count on those butterflies of fashion who only surround me because I am rich and beautiful? But oh, my friend! I can trust in you because I have proved your worth!"

Churchill's passionate resentment died out for a moment, and bending on his knees before her he pressed his lips to her hand.

"Your lightest word is my law," he said, gently; "but in this I cannot obey you; for even though I lose my life in your defence, I must punish Valentine Eyre for the insult he has offered you, and force his lies down his throat. If he is in Florence—"

"He is in Florence," interrupted Zitella, "at the Hotel Madeline. Oh! Heaven, what have I done!" and hiding her face, Zitella shrieked aloud, "Now you will go and insult him and pay with your life the penalty, or else you will listen to his story, and believe his word against mine!"

Once more Churchill sprang to his feet and stood before Zitella for a moment in angry silence.

"I swear before Heaven," he exclaimed at last, "that if that d—d villain utters one word against you I will shoot him like a dog, and then may I never behold you again if I am such a false traitor as you would make me out!" and then, without another word or look at the beautiful, crouching form, Churchill Penance dashed from the apartment and down a staircase of marble, which had once been trodden by the feet of emperors.

In less than an hour Churchill was at his own villa, which lay in a charming spot about

nine miles outside Florence, and which, in the hope of making Zitella his wife, he had furnished, regardless of expense. Here he waited but to provide himself with a revolver and order fresh horses, when he entered his carriage once more, and was driven back to Florence.

They stopped at the Hotel Madeline, and learned that Mr. Valentine Eyre, an Englishman, was at present staying there; and in a few minutes Churchill stood in the presence of Hermann the gipsy, who, for the last eighteen months had successfully passed himself off as the brother who was still immured in his prison at Rio San Vozes.

But even if the difference between this man and the former Valentine Eyre had been noticeable Churchill was too excited to notice it; and suspecting nothing, he began in his most imperious tones to demand an apology for the insult which had been offered to his friend the Countess Czarvas.

Hermann regarded the young man with a pitying smile, as he replied,—

"I would have you kicked down the stairs for your insolence but that I am so sorry for you, because you have been befooled by that arch fiend—"

"Say that again!" thundered Churchill, furiously.

"A thousand times if you wish to hear it," replied the other, coolly. "You are a fool, and Zitella is a fiend. She sent you here in the hope that we would fight and you should take my life; for while I live no man can win her, and she knows it. But now listen!"

"Not a word," cried Churchill, white with fury. "There, coward and liar, take that!"

The bullet sped home, and as the smoke cleared away Churchill bent over the prostrate form of his foe. He felt as yet neither remorse nor fear, for that Zitella had been revenged was his one thought; but still he bent over the fallen man, and as he removed

the covering from his breast his hand came in contact with a letter, and, as he moved it hastily aside, he saw that the writing was Zitella's, and caught words which impelled him to read more.

"I am sending my English lover to you," read Churchill, "for he is tiresome and dangerous, and if you were to appear here he would make a scene. He will quarrel with you, and a shot will settle the difficulty."

After this Churchill could read no more, for the paper had become soaked with the blood which was flowing from Hermann's wound; but he had read sufficient to prove in what an evil cause he had stanned. Then crushing the letter up in his hand, and cursing her who had penned it, Churchill opened the door and passed downstairs, wondering that no one appeared to arrest his footsteps.

He thought that the hotel must be deserted, as the shot just fired seemed to attract no attention, and so he proceeded to his carriage, and was driven rapidly away.

As he passed the hotel where he sometimes dined when in Florence, Churchill saw one of his own servants from the villa; and seeing his master's carriage, the man signalled the coachman to stop, when he handed a telegram through the window of the carriage, and with a sudden fearful prevision of ill tidings Churchill tore open the envelope, and read a message bidding him hasten home if he would see his mother alive.

Within the hour Churchill Penance was on his way to England.

(To be continued.)

It is positively declared by distinguished French scientists that modern pet dogs, leading luxurious lives and lacking a proper amount of exercise, are becoming subject to violent attacks of hysteria and similar nervous complaints, and that many of them die from disorders of this nature.





"YOU HAVE MADE A MISTAKE, I THINK!" DOLORES SAID, SHARPLY. "THIS PART OF THE GROUNDS IS PRIVATE!"

NOVELETTE.

## ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

—X—

### CHAPTER I.

FAIRIES are out of date—those marvellous god-mothers who worked such wonders for their favourites. Those mischievous elves, who interfered so persistently in the family arrangements, are unheard of in the nineteenth century, or else every one would have declared that Dolores Fane must have been a changeling. As this explanation of the young lady's peculiarities was denied them they simply shrugged their shoulders and wondered how the dear Rector and Mrs. Fane could have come by such a daughter.

Not that our heroine was eccentric or strange in the way a doctor views those terms. She had been the cleverest girl at Meresham House, taking all the prizes as a matter of course. She sang exquisitely, and played the piano with an artist's touch. Had she been born the child of fashionable people, and accustomed to society from her infancy; had she courted to the Queen at eighteen, and been launched forth into Belgravia, the chances are Miss Fane would have been styled delightful and charming; but her fate had cast her in another sphere where it must be confessed she was not entirely a success. For a worthy clergyman who spends his life in preaching against pomps and vanities, for a matron whose idea is that all gaiety and pleasure must be wrong, it was something of a trial to have for first-born a girl to whom amusement was as necessary as the air she breathed.

Dolores was ten years old when her parents came to Mitford—a pretty little place enough, half village, half town, and only five miles from the grand old city of Meresham. The living was small, two hundred a-year all told, but the Rectory was large and comfortable,

with garden-ground sufficient to provide a good supply of fruit and vegetables. The Rev. Laurence Fane considered himself very fortunate to obtain the preferment, and installed his wife and five children in the old ivy-covered house as soon as might be. Mitford was a sociable place, and every one called on Mrs. Fane. She was a quiet, unobtrusive woman, whose tastes, like her dress and complexion, were of a pale, neutral tint—the kind of woman who considers the kitchen and nursery her proper sphere, who believe gaiety and pleasure must be wrong, and that to be religious such vanities should be given up.

The Rev. Laurence partook a little of the Calvinistic doctrine in his views. He was a gloomy man, one who spared neither himself nor his family, who worked hard, and honestly did his best; but unfortunately held that his parish must be driven, not led to heaven.

How such a pair could have had a daughter like Dolores baffled comprehension. When she came to Mitford, a child of ten, she was the most mischievous imp in the Sunday-school, and was sent home from it in disgrace so often that at last her mother declared it was no use dressing her for the purpose of attending it.

She was sent daily to Miss Grant's establishment for young ladies, but played truant so often the Rector doubted if she had enough instruction to be worth the school bill.

For three months she ran wild at home, while her mother attempted to teach her; but poor Mrs. Fane had so many other duties that Dolores managed to evade all regular lessons, and she might have grown up the veriest ignoramus ever known but for a happy chance which befel her.

She was always wandering about, and being, after all, only a child, it happened that one day she lost her way, and actually wandered into Meresham, where she was discovered in the Cathedral joining in the service and singing the anthem as sweetly as a chorister. A lady, struck by the wonderful voice, and

amazed at the dusty little shoes, barehead, and soiled pinafore, (Dolores had been wandering about since the morning, and had lost her hat), followed her out of the Cathedral and began to talk to her.

Miss Fane had no shyness, and, it must be confessed, no shame. She told her listener quaintly she was a bad girl, and would never come to any good, (her father's phrase, and repeated with a perfect imitation of his voice and manner); she was even too wicked for Miss Grant to teach her any longer. She wasn't sorry, Miss Grant had so many boys, and they were always in the way.

Dolores' new friend was the proprietress of Meresham House, a woman already comfortably off, and whose school increased every year. Whether it was the charm of Dolores' smile, or the thought of getting a victory over Miss Grant, (who had once been a teacher at Meresham House, and yet had dared to start in humble opposition not five miles off), or perhaps pure womanly compassion for the lonely child, Mrs. Trafford drove Dolores home in her own phaeton, and had an interview with the Rector, at which she offered to educate his little girl free of all charge as a boarder at Meresham House.

I have often noticed that religious people are not too holy to accept benefits from worldlings. The money value of what Mrs. Trafford offered was once a hundred pounds a-year, and the Fanes jumped at it. Dolores went back there and then to her new school, where it was soon discovered she possessed great abilities, and, despite the character given of her, a warm, loving heart.

For seven years Miss Fane spent nine months out of every twelve away from home. At last a day came when Mrs. Trafford confessed she knew as much as the establishment could teach her. She would willingly have obtained a situation as governess for her favourite; but, alas! Dolores was a beauty, and her manners had none of the dignity and firmness which might have got over this ob-

jection. She could not be retained as teacher in a school where all the girls regarded her as the ringleader of their amusements. There was nothing for it but to send her home, where, as her kind friend hoped, she might be of use to her overworked mother.

It is rather a humiliating thing to confess of one's heroine, but at Miss Bolt's Rectory Dolores proved a complete failure.

The Rector thought an accomplished girl might save them the salary of a schoolmistress and teach the village children; so Dolores was sent every day to be initiated in her duties by Miss Bolt, the solitary mistress.

Now Miss Bolt was going to her sweetheart in Australia, and so could have had no animus against her successor. She was, besides, devoted to Mr. and Mrs. Fane, and knowing what a boon the forty pounds a year would have been to them, would gladly have given a few hours each day of her scanty leisure to drill Miss Dolores in her new duties; but at the end of the third morning she was in despair, and when school was over put on her bonnet and went round to the Rectory.

"It won't do, sir," she said Mr. Fane frankly. "Miss Dolores is a very clever young lady, but she can't keep order no more than my tabby cat. She takes the pretty children on her lap and gives them sweets, and as to the naughty ones, she just laughs at them."

Poor Mr. Fane. He looked helplessly at his visitor.

"Dolores is very young, Miss Bolt, perhaps in time—?"

Miss Bolt shook her head.

"She'll never keep a lot of children in order, sir, it's not in her; if she sees anything funny she must laugh, she can't help it. Why, only this morning, while I was reading prayers, she burst out laughing because Willy Judge had put on his grandmother's spectacles!"

"It's very hard on me," said the Rector slowly.

"Very hard, sir. There's no accounting for the ways of providence, but if Miss Mary had lived!"

The Rector groaned. Mary was his favourite child. In age she came next Dolores, but she had seemed years wiser and sturdier. She was a prim, thoughtful, little body, plain and homely, but good to the core.

Dolores told Mr. Trafford once Mary seemed years older than her mother, but Mary slept in the village, obedient and quiet, and could not return to fill Miss Bolt's situation. The two next were Mary and her sister, but they were in a kind of school; then came Dolores, but she had four daughters, three born at Missford, but the eldest was barely ten.

Father and mother spoke a little sleepily to Dolores, who longed to be home.

"I'm sorry," she said, frankly, "not to save you the money, but you know, father, the school is awfully failing, and the children aren't getting any better. I never could have been a teacher there."

"Dolores!" said her mother, sharply, "do you never think of all? You are nearly eighteen; it is high time you were earning your own living!"

Dolores smiled.

"I will teach the children, here," she said, cheerfully; "that will be better than nothing!"

But the children would not agree. They asked their sister some play-fellow, but would not submit to her many other caprices.

Dolores then tried to make her family's dresses; but, alas! she always used worse as much stuff as her mother, though necessary, besides imparting a hopelessly worldly look to the little garments.

Then, as though purposely to give her advantage of being useful, the organist died; and Dolores, of her own accord, volunteered to replace him.

Here, at least, no fault could be found with her. She played magnificently; indeed her music, as Mr. Fane said, was far too good for a village church, and few people should think

he was getting popish by having such grand voluntaries, he took to preaching long sermons against Romanism, which sent his flock to sleep, and made Dolores yawn in the organ loft, from which elevated post she usually enjoyed a grand view of the ladies' bonnets!

Dolores had left school more than a year at this particular Christmas time we are going to tell of. She had quite settled down as organist to her father, and was a subject for wonder to his parishioners.

No one actually disliked her, she was too sweet-tempered; but certainly more than three-fourths of her acquaintance disapproved of her. She was no student, no musician, and such a coquette. The last charge was strenuously denied by her friends.

Dolores was the prettiest girl in the neighbourhood, and it was not her fault if the young men liked to talk to her.

As to her having refused two or three offers, at eighteen she need not be a busy. It was very well for Mrs. Fane to advocate the cause of the young Merzham brewer; but everyone knew Dolores had been educated at Mrs. Trafford's, and had a right to be exclusive. Still, though one or two voices were raised in her defence, the episode of the brewer had made her decidedly unpopular.

Most of the girls about thought him quite a catch. Had he not a comfortable red-brick house and eight hundred a year? Did he not drive the smartest phaeton in the city, and declare openly he never meant his wife to soil her fingers, but to keep her quite the lady?

It was Christmas-time. Dolores had been practising for the extra services, and had forgotten the time till reminded of it by the gathering gloom. Then she looked the organ, dismissed the little boy who acted as blower, and went leisurely down the steps that led from the organ-loft into the church.

It was her birthday. She was just nineteen; and Dolores, though usually the gayest and most light-hearted of human creatures, felt sad.

Nineteen! Just the age when other girls were enjoying their first of pleasure and gaiety; but for her there was no chance of either. Looking forward she could see nothing bright or attractive in her lot.

Her father was fifty. There seemed little chance of his ever having a better living. She would live on at Missford, getting older every year, till at last her youth slipped by her, and there was nothing left but an old, middle age.

Her mother had never forgiven her for refusing Mr. Banks. His red whiskers, pugy figure, and slight uncertainty as to his hair had not seemed to Mrs. Fane any insupportable objection.

Then the Rector had growned when he heard of her folly, and afterwards asked himself, for the hundredth time, why he had not done to be afflicted with such a child.

But little Dolores' life seemed to her a great mistake, and there were tears in her soft eyes, as she turned to leave the church. Yet her face did not look made for sorrow or a lonely life.

Even her best friend, who confessed she was pretty, her friends declared she was something more.

Dolores' face at this time was that charming combination of soft girl and woman. Her figure was pliant and graceful, even in her homely-made black mantle, but her face retained criticism, and those who looked at it once only wanted to look again.

It was not the regularity of her features (though this was perfect) which impressed you, but an indescribable something which shone out of her dark velvety brown eyes.

Her eyes themselves were large and lustrous, with dark brows and long lashes, which looked almost black; and they rested against her fair cheek. (She was almost too pale, but her eyes were so full of life, they gave her a brilliant colour, and there was nothing stolid or unbecoming in her complexion.) It was that fair earnestness in the old masters had done to represent. Her hair, in spite of those dark

eyes and lashes, was fair, beautiful soft brown hair, which glistened like pure gold in the sunshine.

Mrs. Fane, who thought the tint worldly, had done her utmost to darken it with pomade in the days before Dolores went to Merzham House, and for the same motive had kept it clipped like a boy's. But Mrs. Trafford had other views; and before she had the care of Dolores a year the young lady used to wear a floating, wavy mass, half-covering her shoulders, and looking in the distance like a golden veil!

Miss Fane herself never thought of the "clipped" days without horror; but they had done no harm. The hair, which slipped in soft waves, and was pulled low on her neck, was thick and luxuriant enough to have formed a good advertisement for any "restorer" or "wash" she patronised.

She wore a plain serge dress, light cloth jacket, and soft felt hat, simple garments enough, but Dolores had a knack of making all her clothes look graceful. The jacket fitted her to a nicety, and she sat for just what she looked like on the wavy hair, making her look a little like the picture of some Russian princess. In truth, this little world-doll had every air of high birth, which puzzled people, who were spiteful enough to remember that her father had been the son of a country linen-draper (who died insolvent), and her mother the daughter of one of his assistants.

She closed the heavy oak door, and had just turned the key, when she became aware that someone was waiting for her. On the rustic seat in the porch sat a young man, who, as Dolores came towards him, took both her hands in his, and asked, a little gravely,—

"Do you know me, Dolly?"

"It's dear old Geoff!"

Rather a familiar greeting for a young lady of nineteen to give to a stranger who is of no kin to her; but the friendship which united Dolores Fane and Geoffrey Dean was of no common kind.

In Dolly's first year at Merzham House there came to the school a pretty, delicate child of seven, the only daughter of wealthy parents, who sent her to Mrs. Trafford's instead of engaging a governess, only because the doctor had said she must have young companions. May Dean and Dolores took to each other from the first. May was always being sent for to go home from Saturday to Monday. It grew into a custom for Dolores to go with her. Lady Dean was greatly fond of the pretty, vivacious child, and during school holidays she would be with her, and Geoffrey, between whom and his little sister a very close friendship had been born, was the devoted slave of May and her friend.

The intimacy was encouraged by Mrs. Trafford and winked at by the Fanes. They deemed Lady Dean a worldly woman, but she was a generous one, and disliked to see Dolores so freely for her parents' sake to offend her. And so the friendship went on till May showed signs of the family disease, and was hurried off to Italy, while Geoffrey was still at college.

Letters at first were frequent. Then came the news that Sir Guy was dead, and this widow meant to examine almost daily her daughter's health was quite established. The correspondence languished; the Deans were always wandering about, and it will easily be believed, the foreign postage was a check on Dolores writing often. So Dolores left Merzham House the last of her youth; and now she was Sir Geoffrey's usual before her, and she, forgetting the somewhat powerful baronet, had actually addressed him as "dear old Geoff!"

She blushed crimson; but Sir Geoffrey did not seem at all inclined to grant the liberty.

"You are not changed at all, Dolly. I should have known you, anyhow!"

"Missford did not seem much to change me," said Mrs. Fane, demurely. "It is tendency is rather to fatten." Some take longer



"and some shorter to become fossils; but how in the world did you come here?"

"I drove over from the Court; it's only seven miles, you know. The mother wouldn't let May come because there's an east wind. I've been to the Rectory, and Mrs. Fane said I should find you here."

"And I thought you were in Italy?"

"We have been in England since the spring; but May was presented, and then we had to visit all our relations in the autumn. Positively this is the first time we have been at the Court for five long years."

"And May is quite well?"

"She is much better. She thinks you very hard-hearted for not writing to her."

"I thought she had forgotten me?"

"We have none of us done that. Don't you want to know what I came to Milford for?"

"To see me!"

"To bring a message from my mother to Mrs. Fane. We want you to help us to keep Christmas at the Court. Mother said I was not to come back without you."

"Me!" said Dolores, most indignantly. "Oh, Sir Geoffrey, are you quite sure? But it's no use, mother never would say yes!"

"She has said it," returned Geoffrey, "though I confess it was an awful struggle to get her to. For one whole hour, Miss Dolores, did I sit trying to convert her and the Rector to my views. It was a tough bit of work."

"What did they say?"

"The organ was the first difficulty; but a friend of mine from Marsham will be very happy to take the services, so I got over that!"

"He did not think it necessary to tell Dolores the 'friend' was a struggling young musician who would have been thankful to come much further than Milford for two guineas a week, and the loan of a horse from Sir Geoffrey's stable."

"And then?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Fane seem to think Dean Court a very wicked place; and that the levity of your disposition rendered it peculiarly unfit for you. I declared my cousin, a clergyman, was there, and I would request him to attempt your reformation; but it was hard work. Still I won the day at last. Your mother and Jane are packing a box, and I am to have the pleasure of driving you home with me."

"For one moment Dolores was happy—then a fear assailed her. May Dean had loved her dearly. For four years they had been as sisters, but they had now been parted for an even longer time than that of their friendship. What if May had changed? She had been to most of the celebrated places in southern Europe. She had courted to the Queen. She might look down on her old school friend."

"Perhaps Sir Geoffrey thought of the doubts which troubled his companion."

"You will find May just the same," he said, smiling. "I tell her she is a shocking baby for seventeen. Do you know, Dolly, she has a very faithful heart? We have seen a great many young ladies in the last five years, but no one has ever rivalled you!"

"May was always a darling. I do wish she had written; it would have made me glad even to know she was in England!"

"I accept a treat in my life," said Sir Geoffrey, smiling; "and May will tell you if I don't. She would have written last Easter. The mother wanted Mrs. Fane to spare you to stay with us, but a rumour reached us that your time was otherwise engaged."

"Do you mean the organ?"

"I mean Mr. Banks! Dolly, we all ought to go down on our knees and apologise to you for believing you would take up with such a little snob; but how could we help it? Dr. Melville actually wrote to us that he had the news from Mrs. Fane herself."

"Well," said Dolly, magnanimously, "I suppose you thought mother ought to know."

"But I couldn't have done it. I almost hate him!"

"Perhaps Mrs. Fane does not share your feelings?"

"She used to have him to tea once a week, and always made a cake. I told her at last it came expensive. Mr. Banks is going to marry Susan Ketch, the pastry-cook's daughter. Their banns were read last Sunday!"

"I know."

"And that brought you here?"

He smiled.

"I never believed the report, Dolly, but the mother did. She seemed to think you capable of sacrificing yourself to your family. I fear my faith in your generosity was not so strong."

They were at the Rectory gates. Mrs. Fane stood on the threshold, the Rector behind her. Jane, the eldest of the younger girls, now a handy maiden of eleven, with a white pinafore and red pig-tail, was hovering near.

"What a time you have been, Dolores! I expect you kept Sir Geoffrey knocking at the church door till he was tired. You forget everything when you're at that organ."

Sir Geoffrey did not explain they had been talking for nearly half-an-hour. He wished Mr. and Mrs. Fane a happy Christmas, (they piquely objected to the term merry,) shook hands with freckled Jane, helped Dolores into the dog-cart, and drove off with her.

"It is just as though I were a Cinderella," said Dolly, simply, "and you a kind of fairy godfather, if there were ever such things!"

"I am not quite venerable enough," said the Baronet, a little shortly. "How old do you think me?"

"You were grown up when I first knew you," said Dolly, "and that is ages ago. Why I was nineteen to-day. I feel quite venerable!"

"And I am eight-and-twenty."

"Are you?"

"Does it seem very old to you?"

"I don't know," said Dolores, gravely. "It's different for a man. When I am eight-and-twenty I shall feel all my youth is over."

"Nonsense!"

"Have I shocked you? I am always shocking someone. Do you know, Miss Anastasia Smith—she's head of the district visitors—told father the other day nothing but some awful trouble would ever steady me. That she was sure if I was ever saved it would be by the ordeal of fire!"

"What an awful woman!"

"I pretended not to understand she meant the fire of affliction, and took the furnace to mean natural flames. So I told father if ever the house was set on fire it would be mother's fault, because she wouldn't see safety matches. I hate Anastasia Smith!"

"So do I."

"Why, you don't know her?"

"Well, I should if I had that pleasure. Never mind, Dolly, you have been lent to us now, and we shan't let you go in a hurry. You must try to enjoy yourself at the Court, and forget all about your fiery destiny."

Another five minutes, and she stood in the well-remembered house. A huge fire burnt in the hall; the men-servants, made way for a gentleman in widow's weeds, and Lady Dean kissed the little ne'er-do-well very warmly.

"Welcome, dear; and a happy Christmas when it comes! Now I must take you to May."

She need not have feared her greetings here. May flung her arms round Dolores' neck and kissed her. She seemed just the same warm-hearted child who had gone away five years before, and Dolores noticed, with a pang, that she seemed just as delicate. The beautiful transparent complexion, the feverishly-bright blue eyes, made Dolores understand why, in answer to her inquiries, Sir Geoffrey had never said his sister was "quite well." May Dean's friends perpetually assured each other she was "much better," "far stronger," "not nearly so fragile;" but somehow not one of

them had ever ventured to assert she was "quite well."

Lady Dean took Dolores up to her room, which as of old, opened into May's. The widow made her guest feel thoroughly at home, and left her with the hope she would "try to be happy at the Court."

As she looked round the beautiful room Dolores thought she would have little need of "trying" to fulfil her kind friend's wish. She little guessed that the heavy sorrow desired for her benefit by Anastasia Smith—the ordeal by fire—was really drawing near, and that it would come to her not in her narrow, unlovely home, but amid the beauty and the grandeur, amid the love and tenderness, which surrounded her at the Court.

## CHAPTER II.

Two days passed, and Dolores felt quite at home in the beautiful house where she was made so welcome. She was not in the least oppressed by the grandeur and luxury of the Court, but took to both as naturally as though she had never turned dresses and trimmed hats.

The clergyman's cousin, whose presence Sir Geoffrey had held out as a bait to Mrs. Fane, proved to be a kind old man, with silver hair and a benevolent face, who, by a fortunate theory that youth was the time for enjoyment would certainly have spared Dolores' parents.

It quite eased the young lady herself, and she was soon at ease with Mr. Pemberton, even to the extent of informing him how complete a failure she was thought at Milford Rectory.

Christmas Eve came at last, cold, bright and frosty. Sir Geoffrey looked up with pleased surprise from his share of the general correspondence.

"Rex will be here to-night. Only fancy, after his repeated refusal he actually offers us a visit!"

"I shall be delighted to see him!" said Lady Dean, warmly. "You know, Geoff, I don't worship him as you do, but I always feel sorry for him!"

"He has the saddest face I ever saw!" said May, gently. "Do you know, Geoffrey, I am half sorry he has chosen to night, when there will be a host of strangers?"

"Mr. Pemberton looked up quickly."

"Is the gentleman a misanthrope that he objects to social gatherings?"

"He has had enough trouble to make him so," replied Sir Geoffrey, gravely. "Surely, Cousin John, you remember the Reginald Carlyon of my college days? We were inseparable friends."

Dolores felt there was a story connected with the expected guest, and after breakfast beguiled May into the conservatory, and begged her to tell her all about Mr. Carlyon.

"Lord Carlyon!" corrected May, gently.

"It is almost the saddest story I ever heard; but I would rather you knew it before you saw him."

"I hate people with stories! Did I ever see him, May? Did he come to the Court, long ago?"

"He has never been to the Court. He was Geoff's college friend, and he spent Christmas with us in Italy the first winter we went abroad. I was only a child then, Dolores; but I can remember how bright and clever he was. Father was delighted with him. He was the life of the house."

"And he was not Lord Carlyon then?"

"Oh, no! He was only the nephew of the reigning lord. He had two or three hundred a year; but he was very clever, and meant to be an author. Geoff says his success was certain. He had just left college when he came to us. He is four years older than Geoff."

"And was his book a failure?"

"He never published a book. He was in London writing for the magazines, and beginning already to make a name for himself

when he fell in love. I never saw her, but Geoff says she was brilliantly beautiful."

"And she refused him?" interrupted the little ne'er-do-well. "I don't call that the saddest story I ever heard!"

May smiled.

"Let me finish. She was a penniless governess, and she accepted Rex gladly. Their wedding day was fixed. He accepted a secretaryship, which, with the addition of his earnings by his pen, would provide her with every comfort. Lord Carlyon, who was very fond of Rex, as the bride had no parents, invited her down to Carlyon Manor. He said his wife would choose her trousseau, and he would give her away. The secretaryship took up a great deal of Rex's time. He went down with his fiancée to Carlyon, and left her in his aunt's care while he returned to London. In six weeks' time they were to be married."

"Don't say she died!" pleaded Dolores. "She ought to have lived. She had everything to make her happy—youth, beauty, love—how could she die?"

"She is alive now, dear. When Rex went back to Carlyon it was to find her flown. That very day she had eloped with his cousin, the heir of the manor, and ten thousand a-year."

For once Dolores was silent. She no longer complained the story was not sad enough.

"It was an awful blow," went on May, gently. "He threw up everything—literature, position, prospects. He had, I told you, something of his own, and he buried himself in a miserable hut, somewhere near a remote Yorkshire village. He would not see a friend or read a letter. He suffered no human creature to cross his threshold except a deaf and dumb old woman who waited on him. It was a kind of living death."

"I call that cowardly," said Dolores, bluntly. "He ought to have held up his head, and felt such a woman was not worth regrets. Has Sir Geoffrey persuaded him to exchange the hut for the Court by any unknown spell, and do you think he will have forgotten how to talk? He must be rather out of practice."

"You don't understand, Dolly. All I told you happened three years ago. James Carlyon did not enjoy the pleasure of his cruel triumph long. He died within six months of his wedding, and his widow was left utterly unprovided for, at her father-in-law's mercy. The old lord tried to find Rex and induce him to accept a position worthy of his heir, but all inquiries failed. He was broken-hearted at his son's death, and did not survive him a year. Then the executors appealed to Geoffrey as Reginald Carlyon's most intimate friend."

"Geoff knew his address, but was bound by a promise not to divulge it, so he went down to Yorkshire himself and took the news. It seems the poor fellow did not even know of his cousin's death. He would not go to Carlyon, or give a single order respecting the estate. He signed a paper endowing Geoffrey with full power to act for him, and went abroad."

"Then you have never seen him since?"

"Yes. He spent two or three months with us last winter, but he was, oh! so changed, I think Mrs. Carlyon's treachery wrecked his life."

"And he is Lord Carlyon?"

"Yes. He is the master of the Manor now, and has ten thousand a-year; but I don't think he will ever be happy again. I don't, indeed, Dolores!"

"He might easily."

"How?"

"You said Mrs. Carlyon was a widow. If he chose, no doubt she would be willing to go back to their old relations."

May shook her head.

"You don't know Rex?"

"One doesn't need to know him to give an opinion. If he is wrapped up in the pretty widow he had much better let bygones be bygones, and marry her!"

May looked half vexed at the bare suggestion.

"You used to be romantic, Dolly, I thought

you would have been full of pity for Lord Carlyon?"

"I never pity rich people," said Dolores, slowly. "It seems to me gold must lighten their sorrows wonderfully. Besides, I don't see what trouble Lord Carlyon has now!"

"Dolores!"

But the little ne'er-do-well held her ground.

"I don't," she said, stoutly. "If he's still in love with his cousin's widow he can marry her. If he isn't, there's nothing for him to fret about!"

"Dolly, you are too exacting. Well, we won't talk about Rex. Let me tell you who are coming to-night. Do you know it is our first party here since my father's death?"

The list was rather lengthy. Ten or twelve people to stay in the house, and a dozen others from the neighbourhood to dine and spend the evening. Among others Dolores noticed the name of Lucy Leigh, who had been at school with her and May.

"We saw a good deal of Lucy abroad," said May, quietly. "Mother got quite fond of her, but I never did."

"I almost hated her at school," confessed Dolores. "She seemed to have a knack of reminding me I was only a poor clergyman's daughter, and that she was a great heiress. I wonder she is not married."

"Perhaps the prince didn't come," returned May, simply. "Anyway, she is Miss Leigh still. It is a fancy of Geoff's that she will cure Lord Carlyon's disappointment; but I don't think her half good enough for Rex."

Sir Geoffrey and his mother went to the station to meet their guests. Mr. Pemberton was to drive with May to the town, shopping; and Dolores, who had set her heart on some hollyberries to wear with her plain black dress, declined May's entreaties to come in the brougham, and set out for a long ramble in the park.

"You are sure you are not frightened?" asked May. "Won't you take my maid with you?"

But Miss Fane laughed the idea to scorn. Did she not know the park as well as May herself, and what would the maid—a French damsel of much fashion—say to scrambling through a hedge?

"We will both have plenty of holly to wear to-night," said Dolores, decidedly. "And, May, it will be perfectly delightful to scamper through the old places again, and forget I am nineteen. I only wish you could come too."

"Don't tire yourself, dear," said May, kindly, "and don't be late. Mother and Geoff will be home with the new arrivals soon after five, while Cousin John and I shall be in by four, and keep each other company till you come."

Dolores agreed at once. She put on a plain blue serge, the very oldest dress she had with her, a long cloth jacket, and the very same fur hat she had worn when Sir Geoffrey came to meet her in her father's chuch.

Very pretty and very winsome she looked, as she waved her good-byes to May. Perhaps the consciousness of her expedition being just a little out of the common way gave an extra zest to its enjoyment.

It was a lovely winter's day—the air crisp and frosty, just the ideal weather for Christmas Eve!

Dolores knew the holly bushes well. They grew at the further end of the park, just where it branched off into the wood.

There was a public footpath through the last, leading to Moresham, but it was seldom used; and Miss Fane had forgotten its existence till, as she finished filling her basket with the bright red berries, she saw a stranger watching her with rather marked attention.

Now, Dolores hated criticism; perhaps, poor child, because she had had so much of it all her life. She looked at the offender, and saw a dark man in a thick great-coat. Without waiting to inquire further she said, sharply,—

"You have made a mistake, I think. This part of the grounds is private!"

She was strictly in the right, for the gentle-

man had emerged from the wood, and, instead of following the broad public path, had crossed to the holly hedge, which Miss Fane had been so busily robbing.

He bowed, and Dolores fancied there was a suspicion of sarcasm in his voice as he asked,—

"Are you a member of Sir Geoffery's family?"

"I am his guest," said Dolores, valiantly.

"So am I!" returned the stranger; "so if he allows you to trespass I fancy I may do so too. I made an awful mistake; got out at Little Moresham instead of going on to the junction, where I expect they sent to meet me. I have had to walk the whole five miles."

"Five miles is not far," said Dolly, who, finding herself in the wrong, felt, to use a nursery phrase, as though her temper had been thoroughly upset, and she must be spiteful.

"Our opinions differ, apparently; but if you are going back to the Court perhaps you will kindly be my guide, for I am quite a stranger in these parts."

Even these last words gave no clue to Dolores. She imagined the hero of May's story would prove a thin, consumptive-looking young man, with hollow cheeks and a hectic colour! Her present companion looked the picture of health—a tall, finely built, muscular young Englishman, who carried his six feet well, and would have been remarkable for his broad shoulders and bronzed, hearty complexion even in Yorkshire, the county of athletes and giants.

Running through the list of guests rapidly in her mind, Dolores decided her new acquaintance must be a certain Mr. Goldsmith, a country squire, invited to the Court simply because his mother was cousin to Lady Dean. As the said George Goldsmith cared for nothing but horses and dogs, his entertainment had been rather a difficulty.

May said frankly she thought him cruel, and even Lady Dean declared it was a pity his conversation laid so much in the stables.

"I am going back to the house now," admitted Miss Fane. "And I don't mind showing you the way, but there's no one indoors but May. Are you sure you wouldn't rather see the horses? Sir Geoffrey thinks he has a very fine stud."

The listener stared, and did not respond to the well-meant offer.

"Thank you, I prefer to see Miss Dean. How is she?"

Dolores stared.

"May is better," she said simply; "at least people say so. How long is it since you have seen her?"

"I forget!" Then, as they drew near the house, "But pray don't let me deprive you of inspecting the horses, whose merits you described so well."

Dolores flushed. She had been called a coquette and a flirt times without number. She had been told she was lazy, worldly, and useless too often for the tidings to please her; but this was the first time any one had dared to accuse her of masculine tastes. She looked at her tormentor with visible anger.

"I am going to May," she said slowly. "My tastes are not those of a stable; you can please yourself."

He looked at her in some surprise.

"Are you staying at the Court?"

"I told you so before," said the girl defiantly. "You need not believe me unless you like."

He smiled, conduct which fairly exasperated Dolores. She said not another word until they reached the house, where the butler came forward to receive the guest, and Miss Fane ran helter-skelter into the drawing-room.

"May, I have met your cousin George, and he is odious."

To her intense surprise a fair, boyish-looking man, whom she had not noticed as sitting near her friend, said laughing,—

"Now, I call that a shame. I fancy, May, I am the only cousin George you possess, and



I'm sure I never dreamed of offending this young lady!"

May had a woman's tact, and introduced Dolores to Mr. Goldsmith at once, saying,—  
"Pray what have you done with the individual you mistook for George?"

"Oh! he's in the hall."

Mr. Pemberton went out to meet him, and Dolores sitting down on the sofa received a cup of tea from the real Mr. Goldsmith with great relief.

"You mustn't think me rude," she said, in her pretty way. "But really he was odious!"

"Then I am glad I was not 'he'; but won't you tell me how my double offended you?"

"Oh! he wasn't like you in the least!" said Dolores, with a sincerity which flattered Mr. Goldsmith extremely. "He was horrible, he laughed at everything I said—sneered, I mean!"

"He must have been a cad!" said Goldsmith, promptly. "Have you been to gather this?" touching her basket of holly. "What a lot you have got!"

"Haven't I?" Miss Fane's good temper had quite returned. "You see, May and I always used to go and gather holly when we were here as children."

"Then you and my cousin are old friends?"

"We were schoolfellows!"

They were sitting on a sofa by the fire. May Dean had left them, and gone to greet her brother's guest.

Dolores could just see that there was nothing alighting in his treatment of her. He held the little hand in his, and smiled on the pretty child a smile which changed his whole face.

Perhaps it was as well Dolores could not catch his words.

"I am so sorry to have missed dear old Geoff, May—you'll let me say May still, won't you? I lost my way in the park, and fell in with the most disagreeable young woman I ever met. She wanted to take me round the stables! It's not like you to have such a very rapid young lady for a friend."

"She is the dearest girl I ever met!" replied May, loyally; "and I am sure you'll like her very much when you know her!"

"I beg leave to differ," said Lord Carlyon.

Dolores retired to her own room before Sir Geoffrey and his mother returned.

She was not vain, but yet the matter of dress troubled her not a little. Given parents, who to small means unite a horror of worldly array, and it is no small difficulty for a girl in Dolly's position to have a wardrobe equal for visits.

Then her mother and Jane had done the packing. Dolly herself would have pressed every summer frock she had into the service; but these pious assistants had decided her blue serge for mornings, her grey cashmere for afternoons and Sundays, with her black grenadine for evenings, would be ample.

She had worn the last to dinner ever since she came. A poor little frock, pretty and simple enough in itself, it had just passed muster while the family were alone, but how would it look with a score or so of guests to cast it in the shade by their brilliant toilets?

Dolly had a born gift for needlework. She contemplated a reckless slashing off of the sleeves, a bold hacking of the neck, and a little finishing off with cheap black lace. Her fair childish throat and white, rounded arms would at least relieve the funeral hue of the garment, and the holly-berries must do the rest.

To find on her bed the daintiest of white muslin dresses—puffed, frilled, and draped in the newest fashion—was a charming surprise; but perhaps the little note which accompanied the present was even more precious in its motherly kindness.

Lady Dean wrote that she looked on Dolores as May's sister during her stay at the Court, and it had been a great pleasure to her to choose her a few little things she thought she would like—a little Christmas present, as it

were, from herself, which Dolores must not refuse to wear for her old friend's sake.

Dolly understood then the mysterious disappearance of her grey cashmere, which she lost one whole day from breakfast till lunch. She recollected that very morning Lady Dean had driven into Meresham alone, and this was the result; but more wonders awaited the delighted Dolly. At the foot of the bed stood a trunk with the initials D. F., neatly studded in brass nails, and inside the trunk were presents enough to make her believe more than ever the Deans were her good fairies.

Yet there was nothing unsuited to her position—nothing that could have been denounced as absurdly fashionable or grand. A black velvet costume and hat to match, a long cloak lined with fur, a black net evening dress, and a very pretty pale-blue cashmere, gloves, lace and ribbons, shoes, and all those little eloceras to a toilet young girls love.

Dolly stood before the glass and decided, arrayed in these, Lord Carlyon would surely change his opinion of her. Then she recollected, with a crimson flush, his story. Rejected once for a richer man, would he not think all smiles given him now were owed solely to his title and fortune? Well, so be it, decided Dolores, almost viciously. At least he should confess there was one girl who never paid court to him. He should see there was one person proof even against his romantic history.

"I hate him!" decided the little ne'er-do-well, as she stirred the fire into a brighter blaze. "What business has he to make me think he was Mr. Goldsmith? I am sure 'Cousin George' is a great deal nicer than he is. Well, perhaps he won't stay long; it will be much nicer when he has gone!"

But all this time Miss Fane could have described Lord Carlyon exactly, and was quite aware he possessed the trait she admired most in masculine folks—dark curly hair and deep blue eyes. She could have told his height to an inch, and the precise pattern of his great coat. He was horrible, and she hated him, yet somehow the face haunted her as she dressed for dinner.

"Dolly!"

The voice was May's, and the exclamation was one of delighted admiration. She had come in to fetch her friend. It was their way always to go to the drawing-room together; but it seemed to May some fairy touch had been at work, and changed Dolores from a pretty girl into a beauty.

Miss Fane, truth to confess, had taken unusual pains with herself, and was quite contented with her efforts. She wore the muslin dress already described; but not a touch of coloured ribbon, not a single flower disturbed its virgin white, only at her breast she wore a bunch of bright red holly-berries.

Her hair, instead of its simple coil, was combed high on her head, and plaited in a coronet, a trying style, as fashion has since proved; but it suited Dolores. She looked like some stray princess only for her dimpled arms and soft, plump shoulders, which gleamed through the muslin dress like polished marble.

May kissed her.

"I never saw you look so lovely!"

"Don't!" said Dolly, simply. "It's not me, May; it's your mamma's dress!"

"May I come in?"

It was Lady Dean. She had a small cardboard box in her hand, from which she took a necklace of delicate silver ivory.

"I wanted to give you this, dear!" she said, with a motherly smile to Dolores. "I thought it would be just the thing for you to wear to-night; but I see I was mistaken. Nothing would suit you so well as your holly-berries!"

But Dolores exclaimed with delight at the silver necklace, and put it away carefully, while Lady Dean watched her with eyes of fond approval.

"Do you know, Dolly, I shall never quite forgive myself for that mistake of last spring? How could I have believed you would ever marry Mr. Banks?"

Dolly smiled half-mischievously.

"I am sure Miss Ketch is very glad I did not," she said, quietly. "She is quite delighted with her future prospects and brick house, a gig, and Mr. B., as she calls him. I don't know which of the three she esteems most. The wedding is to be in January. I am afraid mother will be intensely miserable till it is all over."

"Do you mean she really wished it, Dolly? She actually wanted you to marry that man?"

Dolly's face grew suddenly grave, almost sad.

"So much so that she has never been quite the same to me since. There's something rather hard in one's own mother being so eager to be rid of one."

Then they went downstairs. Lady Dean presented Dolores to the stranger guests, among others to Lord Carlyon. Perhaps May had not had time to tell her of their unfortunate meeting in the wood. Then dinner was announced, and Dolly found herself going into it on the arm of George Goldsmith.

"I hope you don't mind?" he said simply, with quite a boyish blush. "May has been telling me, the last time she saw me, I could talk of nothing but dogs and horses, and so she had warned you against me, but I have grown out of that now."

"Don't talk as though you were Methuselah," admonished Dolly. "Dogs and horses are not bad things. I like them very much."

"I am glad of it. You see that girl over there?" He was not quite shocking enough to point, but he stared so hard in the desired direction that Dolly had no difficulty in knowing whom he meant. "The one in pink. She's the niece of some neighbour of ours, and I assure you she screams if a dog comes within six yards of her!"

"Miss Leigh was never fond of animals."

"You don't mean you know her?"

"I was at school with her."

"Why, she looks ten years older than you are!" said Mr. Goldsmith, frankly. "I believe she is very intimate here. She used to come and see my mother, and gush about the Deans, as though she was quite one of the family. I declare I thought she must be going to marry Geoffrey!"

A kind of sudden pain seized Dolores. Sir Geoffrey was nothing to her but a friend, still she could not bear to think of his throwing himself away upon frivolous, soulless Lucy Leigh. It was impossible to picture Lucy in his mother's place without a pang.

"Perhaps you asked her?" she said to Mr. Goldsmith, with rather more interest than she had yet shown.

"You must be awfully clever, Miss Fane, to guess that. It is just what I did do, and she wasn't at all offended. Blushed and simpered, and said my congratulations were premature. Premature, indeed! I don't think Geoff's the fellow to be beguiled by an heiress, and Miss Leigh's greatest attraction is her money."

"She is very pretty!"

Mr. Goldsmith shook his head.

"She's too artificial. She always reminds me of one of those clockwork dolls which are wound up to say just two or three words, but couldn't by any miracle pronounce a different one."

Miss Leigh, in a rich silk dress of palest pink, her hair elaborately frizzed and puffed, was talking to Lord Carlyon. By accident or design on the part of Lady Dean she was on his other hand.

"She seems enjoying herself?" said Dolores, carelessly.

"Yes, doesn't she. She's just the sort of girl to appreciate a title. She's got hold of my double. Do you see, the man you met in the wood, and took for me?"

"What do you think of him?"





Very little had come in her way since she left school, and for the most part she had to be content with old volumes that could be picked up second-hand; but no modern song could have suited her better than the air from *Sonnambula* she had chosen.

She sang in English, and every word echoed distinctly through the room. Her voice was rich and powerful, sweet and clear. It had been carefully trained, but the training had been bestowed on first-rate material.

Old Mr. Pemberton was standing near her, and as she would have risen detained her.

"Will you sing once more to oblige an old man, my dear? Some old ballad. I should like, and if possible, Scotch," said he.

She smiled and agreed. She sang the sweetest and sweetest of all Scotch love songs, "Auld Robin Grey," and her listeners thought they had never pitied the ill-starred heroine of the old ballad half enough.

Lord Carlyon was impressed in spite of himself; but Lucy Leigh was too conscious to change her opinion.

"Her confidence is ridiculous!" she said, disdainfully, as Dolores left the piano; "but I believe she teaches music, so no doubt she is used to showing off. I never heard of a girl giving herself so many airs and graces; but she was always an affected little thing."

"You have known her a long while then?"

"I was at school with her. Of course, I never visited her, nor she me!"

"Why not?"

"Mr. Fane is miserably poor. He is Rector of Mifford, and has seven children. I don't suppose his income is more than two hundred a year. The Deans always made a fuss over this girl. But no doubt she works hard enough at home."

Reginald Carlyon felt a thrill of pity for the poor little ne'er-do-well. She had offended all his tastes and prejudices; but, after all, it was rather hard to condemn her utterly on one half-hour's companionship. And surely she could not be wholly bad since May Dean loved her?

Later on he found himself near Dolores, and in his new-born pity he began to talk to her.

"I suppose you are very fond of music, Miss Fane?"

But Dolores had two things respecting him turn into her brain. He fancied every woman wanted to marry him for his money, and he had let Lucy Leigh call her a village coquette. And so the little ne'er-do-well perversely decided she must defend herself by being as disagreeable as possible. At least this conceited nobleman should not count her among the aspirants to his favour.

"Yes."

Only a monosyllable, but the tone in which it was uttered spoke volumes. No experienced London beauty could have administered a snub more reverently. As it happened, however, the snub was lost on Lord Carlyon, and conclusions of his friendly intentions he persevered.

"I used to play myself once, but I gave it up. I have often regretted it since. Music is a great solace."

Dolores could have re-echoed his last sentiment. In all the crowns and petty vexations of her life music was her friend and consolation; but she would not seem to agree with Lord Carlyon.

"There is no chance of my giving it up."

"It would be a great pity if you did. Your friends would lose a treat!"

"I was thinking of the congregation," said Dolores wickedly. "They are too poor to afford an organist, so I always play for them. They like noisy music; it wakes them up, and ours is a very sleepy church."

"Most country churches are."

"I think," said Dolly, demurely, "it would be much better if we had no organs. They take father ages to write, and make him as cross as can be. Then no one ever listens to them."

"You can't be sure of that."

"I can. I sit in the organ loft, and looking

down I can see all the heads nodding, except mother's, and she isn't listening."

"Why do you think that?"

"I know she is trying to calculate when it will be over. She gets more cheerful directly father arrives safely at 'Lasty.' You see if it's too long dinner is such a scramble!"

"And you are the eldest daughter. You must have a busy life, Miss Fane?"

"If I am as idle as I can be, I hate work. To anyone who dares on dogs and horses you know indoor life is trying."

"Dolly," said May, reproachfully, when her friend came in to her room to discuss the evening, "how could you say that?"

"Well," said Dolly, defiantly, "if he chose to think it he could. I never said I doted on dogs and horses, but that to anyone who did, indoor life must be trying."

"You know what you meant him to think; and, Dolly, I did so hope you would like Rex."

"I detest him!"

"But why?"

"I don't know," admitted Dolly, "unless it's that he seemed to dislike me. You see, May, I am used to women thinking me all that's bad; but as a rule men are more lenient."

"George is delighted with you. He is ever so much impressed, and he was always a good-hearted fellow."

"Why, May, you called him cruel?"

"He has a good, true heart," persisted May, who was full of schemes for Dolly's future, "and they have such a beautiful home in Yorkshire! His mother is the dearest old lady I ever saw."

But this speech was utterly thrown away upon Dolores.

"Well, I'm glad you liked him better than you expected, and I think he's much nicer than Lord Carlyon; but, May, how could you tell me Lucy Leigh had improved?"

"I thought so."

"She's as odious as ever!"

"Dolly!"

"I can't help it, May. I'm not good, like you, and when I think a thing I say it. I consider Lucy Leigh simply detestable!"

## CHAPTER III.

CHRISTMAS passed, and we must confess Dolores enjoyed herself without a single anxious pang as to how her beloved organ was getting on without her.

She never cast a thought to the roast beef and rather sickly-looking plum-pudding which would be the Rectory festivities. She never even wondered what Anastasia Smith said to her own absence.

She simply enjoyed herself. Each day brought so much pleasure with it that she had no time to think of Mifford.

No one could have been kinder than Sir Geoffrey and Lady Dean—no sister could have been fonder than May; but yet, as the days wore on, in spite of the luxury and amusement, the kindness and friendship which surrounded her, there was just one drawback to her happiness.

Lord Carlyon and she were still sworn foes. Our little ne'er-do-well, in her great desire that the peer should confess she, at least, had no designs on his hand, was often positively rude to him.

She seemed to have the knack of exhibiting herself at her worst to him; so that, instead of the sweet, innocent piece of girlish gaiety she really was, Reginald believed her an arrant coquette, and what was almost worse, a fast, unimpenitently tomboy.

May tried her best to bring the two she loved to a better understanding of each other, but failed.

Sir Geoffrey grew positively angry with Rex when he spoke slightingly of Miss Fane, and even Lady Dean told him she thought he judged Dolores harshly.

"I never see anything in Dolly's conduct I should blush for if I were her mother."

"Her own mother sees a good deal," said Lord Carlyon, coldly; "at least Miss Leigh says so."

"Oh! if you are going to see, with Lucy's eyes I give it up! She was never fair to Dolly as a child."

"I thought you liked her, Lady Dean?"

"I used to be very fond of her, Lord Carlyon; in fact, I invited her here in the hope she would make you happy; but I tell you frankly I am a little disappointed in her!"

"Well, I don't want to marry her," said Rex, smiling; "so please, Lady Dean, don't reproach yourself with your efforts. But I don't see how she can have offended you?"

Lady Dean did not enlighten him, and he went off to the smoking-room, for the conversation had taken place as he bade his hostess good night. Sir Geoffrey welcomed him with a smile—very warm was their friendship.

"Well, when are we to congratulate you?"

Rex frowned.

"Lady Dean has just enlightened me as to her kind plans for my future!"

"I thought you had settled it by this time?"

"I would not marry Lucy Leigh if there was no other woman in the world! Go in and win the prize yourself, Geoff, if you like?"

Sir Geoffrey smiled.

"I thank you. I would rather not!"

"I am paying you quite a visitation," said Rex, suddenly. "Do you never wonder when I mean to take myself off?"

"I hoped you might stay till we went to London for Easter."

"I have some conscience. You shall get rid of me before that; but you see, Geoff, yours is a pleasant home to stay at, and I am homeless. Besides, it is ever so much nicer now all the crowd has departed."

For the visitors at the Court had dwindled down to five—the old clergyman, George Goldsmith, and Rex himself, while May's two schoolfellows supplied the feminine element.

"Yes; I wonder when Miss Leigh is going?"

"Most inhospitable of men! The fair guest seems in no hurry!"

"My mother is not so infatuated with her as she used to be, and May never cared much for her, so the duty of her entertainment falls on me, and I am by no means a lady's man."

"And Miss Fane," said Rex, quietly.

"When does her visit end?"

"There have been two or three attempts at a recall, but we have parried them successfully hitherto. Mother actually drove over to Mifford herself, which, as she simply detests the Rector, was a great sacrifice. Then we have presented the parish with a deputy organist, so we hope to keep Dolly a little longer!"

"You all seem very fond of her?"

"We are. She always reminded me of a sunbeam—a sunbeam which no one at Mifford Rectory had the taste to appreciate!"

"It doesn't speak well of a girl not to get on with her own family?"

"Ah, you are always hard on Dolores. I wonder, Rex, why you dislike her?"

The question was parried then, but it returned again and again to haunt Lord Carlyon. Why did he dislike Dolores Fane?

She was bold, fast, and unwomanly, an arrant coquette, without a shade of modesty about her was his first answer; but on reflection he had to confess no one but himself and Miss Leigh shared this opinion. Lady Dean thought Dolly charming. One or two high born matrons, visiting at the Court, had openly praised her simple, girlish ways. Suddenly it flashed upon him Dolores' avowed all her vagaries for his benefit. Charming to others, to him she delighted to represent herself at her worst.

"At least, she never tried to enslave me."

he confessed to himself one day. "Poor and with an uncongenial home, it would have been natural enough she should wish for a wealthy husband, but she never schemed for one."

He was interrupted by the sight of the subject of his thoughts. Dolores stood talking to the woman at the lodge, and petting her rosy baby, which seemed almost reluctant to leave her arms for his mother's. She made a very pretty picture as she stood there, and it dawned on Reginald slowly how very sweet her face was when she smiled.

"Are you going far, Miss Fane?"

"Only to the wood. I promised May some more holly."

"May I come with you?"

"If you like."

He had expected a refusal, but Dolores seemed unusually grave and thoughtful, indeed. When they had been walking ten minutes, and she had not smiled once, he began to think there must be something wrong.

"Is there anything the matter, Miss Fane?"

"No," said Dolly, resolutely, "at least, I ought not to think so; but—I am going home to-morrow!"

"That's rather sudden, isn't it?"

"Mother says I have been here six weeks, and I shall be more spoilt than ever!"

"You will come again? May is too fond of you to be without you."

"May won't be pleased with me much longer!"

She was thinking, poor child, of how that very morning George Goldsmith had pleaded for her love, urging that May would be so fond of her dear little cousin. Poor Dolores had found saying "no," painful work. She liked the honest, open-hearted Yorkshireman so well, and knew she might have trusted him so fearlessly. But alas! his words awoke poor Dolores to a knowledge of her own mistake. In her handling of edged tools she had got wounded.

She had learned to love Lord Carlyon with all her heart. While she was trying to make him think her odious, she had all unwittingly given him her love.

Rex was touched at the sad voice, the manner, so different from her usual arch ways.

"I believe you have a great deal more heart than you admit, Miss Fane!" he said, suddenly. "Do you know I have the strangest fancy about you. I think all these weeks you have been acting a part, and that you are not the girl of the period you have tried to appear, but a warm, generous-hearted child!"

There was a strange mistiness about Dolly's blue eyes.

"I always wanted to explain it to you, only, somehow, I couldn't, and I was too proud to tell May. You see I took you for Mr. Goldsmith. I had heard he was fond of horses and dogs, and May is so delicate I wanted to take him off her hands and send him to the stables."

"And then——"

"Well, I had always made up my mind to hate you, just because May liked you so."

"You jealous child!"

"I'm not a child," said Dolly, gravely; "besides, I could not understand why May pitied you, and called yours the saddest story ever heard!"

"I suppose she told you?"

"Yes; and I thought you were rather cowardly to throw up everything!"

"Perhaps I was!"

"And now, as I told May, there was nothing to pity you for!"

"Because I am rich!"

"Oh, dear, no!" and Dolores shook her head. "Riches don't bring happiness. I'm sure the richest woman in Mitford is miserable. She's always grumbling at some one."

"Well; why am I not to be pitied?"

"Because your cousin is dead," said Dolores, quickly.

"And his widow is free?"

"But——"

"It's very strange," said Dolly. "If you don't care for her enough to marry her now you don't need pity for losing her. If you do care no doubt she will have you!"

Lord Carlyon smiled. He really could not help it.

"But I don't!"

"Then you have no right to go about the world posing as a broken-hearted individual."

"But do I?"

"Certainly. Lady Dean always calls you 'that poor Lord Carlyon!' You know she does!"

"Well, you see, I am a lonely, homeless man. I have three houses, but I can't go and live in them by myself."

"Invite Sir Geoffrey?"

"I am not sure that I want him. I would rather have someone else. Dolores, do you believe in second love?"

"Not for a woman!" returned the little ne'er-do-well, decidedly. "Men may be different; but I am sure a woman can only love once."

"Men are different?" said Rex, eagerly. "At least, I know I love you far better than I ever loved the false syren who wrecked my life! Dolores, could you forget our differences, and learn to love me?"

Dolores shook her head.

"You had much better think of someone else. I assure you I am always doing something that would have been far better left undone. Even father says I am a ne'er-do-well."

"But you see, Dolly, I love you! I want no one in the world but you. Put your hand in mine, little one, and promise to be my wife!"

"But——"

"Dolores, what are your objections? Just answer me three things. Do you love anyone else?"

"Oh, dear, no!"

"Has any one else a claim on you?"

"No one."

"Do you positively hate me?"

"I'm sure I tried to!"

So the pretty ne'er-do-well laid down her arms, and she and her sworn foe were plighted lovers. But, alas! for their new-found happiness. They had settled nothing, save that Lord Carlyon should drive over to see Mr. Fane that afternoon; and till his consent was obtained no one else was to hear of the engagement.

This was hardly decided when they met a telegraph boy bound for the house, who, recognising Reginald, put the ominous yellow envelope into his hands.

"Dr. Kennedy, Maida Vale, to Lord Carlyon, Dean Court, Blankshire.—Your aunt is dying. Come at once!"

"You must go," said Dolores, firmly, when he had shown her the message. "You couldn't refuse such an appeal as that!"

"But surely, I can go over to Mitford first?"

"It would make a long delay, and I think I am rather glad that you should see her before you speak to my father."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Carlyon."

"Dolores! Do you doubt me?"

"I couldn't," said the girl, simply; "but May says she is very beautiful, and that you loved her dearly. The old love might return, you know."

"Never."

Dolores smiled a little sadly.

"You have known me just six weeks, and I think you hated me pretty thoroughly the longest part of them."

"Dolly!"

She smiled.

"What is it?"

"Promise to be true to me?"

"I shall love you while I live," answered Dolores, gravely. "I don't think I am given to change."

"And you will write to me?"

"I will answer your letters."

"Let me tell Lady Dean. Let me at least leave my darling to her care?"

But Dolores shook her head.

"I had rather that no one knew before papa. Surely we can trust each other? And, besides——"

Carlyon stroked her hand caressingly, and asked,—

"And besides what, my dearest?"

"You know I laugh about the Rectory as though I did not care, but I am very fond of my father really. He is such a good man, and I am sure he has tried to love me. He can't help it that I am different to all his ideas of what his child should be."

"I don't see what fault he can find with you!" declared Lord Carlyon, quite forgetting that only the week before he had found a great deal himself; "but you shall have your own way, Dolores. I will keep our secret until I can come myself and ask the Rector for his treasure."

"Did you know Lady Carlyon was ill?"

"She has been ailing for some months. I knew that any sudden shock might increase her illness. Dolores, if she is as near death as I fear, I shall not be able to leave her before the end. It may be a week or even a fortnight before I can come to Mitford."

Dolores smiled trustingly into his face.

"I am not afraid of waiting."

"This is our real good-bye," urged Rex, as they paused for a moment beside a rustic arbour, "not our chill, formal leave-taking before others. Dolly, look up at me and kiss me."

She hesitated, but Rex had a good deal of masterfulness in his nature, and Dolores loved to yield to those she cared for. She pressed her lips to his, looking at him the while with a world of love in her blue eyes.

"I always go in this way," she said, as they came in sight of the library, whose front windows stood open. "You had better go on to the hall and explain to Geoffrey."

It smote upon Lord Carlyon, even at that moment, he would rather she had not called his friend by his Christian name, but he was not going to chide his betrothed just yet. He watched Dolores lovingly till she was out of sight; then he walked up the terrace steps and met Sir Geoffrey, who stood there idly smoking a cigar.

The news was soon told, and the Baronet at once admitted the need for Reginald's departure. He rang and ordered the dog-cart to be prepared at once, then he turned to his friend.

"I wish this had not happened, Rex."

"So do I. I am really very much attached to my aunt, although we have been very little together of late years. I can't refuse to go to her, and yet I would give a great deal to stay here."

"You must go! But, Reginald, forgive me for just one word of warning. Be careful."

Very pale and haughty had grown Lord Carlyon's face. In his sensitive reserve he resented the implied caution before it was spoken.

"I fail to understand what danger can lurk in my aunt's house. Explain yourself, Dean!"

"I mean to," said Geoff, simply. "Three years ago your life was blighted by as false a woman as ever breathed, but though false she was dazzlingly beautiful, and had rare fascinations. I do not suppose three years have deprived her of her charms. I know you loved her well. She will appear to you poor, sorrowful, lonely and friendless. It seems to me very possible you may mistake compassion for a warmer feeling, and place your happiness in her hands a second time."

There was something so earnest in Geoff's manner, the warning was so thoroughly disinterested, that Lord Carlyon was touched by it in spite of himself.

"Believe me, Geoff, that is impossible. I go to my aunt's house with a charm which will protect me efficiently against any syren. I grant the danger had I met Gertrude Carlyon before I came here; but I found a cure



for the old wound at the Court—more steadfastly, if less passionately, than I loved Gertrude in the old days. I love another."

"And she is here?" and Geoff's eyes opened wider in their bewilderment.

"She is beneath your roof. If only she had allowed me I should have spoken to your mother before leaving. As it is, I must wait till my return. It will be another bond between us, Geoff, that I found my happiness in your beautiful old home!"

He was gone. He said not another word. Perhaps he felt he had already said more than his promise to Dolores of secrecy warranted.

Sir Geoffrey Dean, the simplest and most straightforward of men, fell into a blunder as natural as it was mistaken. He thought his friend was in love with his own sister, pretty gentle May.

Everything warranted the idea. Years ago she had been his pet and plaything. Later on it was with her and her mother he first broke through the hermit-like habits which followed his great trouble.

He always seemed to look on May as something dear and precious. He had sought her society throughout his long visit more than any other person's; and, as though this were not enough to mislead her brother, he had pointedly said he had wished to speak to Lady Dean.

Besides, he distinctly declared he had found his happiness at the Court, and that his treasure was beneath Sir Geoffrey's roof. There were two other girls besides May in the house, but of one, Miss Leigh, Lord Carlyon had affirmed he would not marry her were she the only woman in the world; and of the other, Dolores Fane, he had spoken bitterly too often—had judged too harshly her girlish merit—for the idea of his loving her ever to enter Geoff's head.

Lady Dean had planned more than one match for Lord Carlyon without ever thinking of her own child; but Geoff, who in many things was clearer sighted than his mother, guessed that Rex had always been May's hero. The fear of losing her had been so present with them, her health had always been so delicate that neither Geoffrey nor Lady Dean ever pictured little May a married woman; but Geoffrey had always felt, ever since that winter when her voice first roused him from the apathy of his disappointment, that May had more than a friend's interest in Reginald Carlyon; and now it had actually come to an understanding between them.

"And she won't let him speak to the *mother* before he has seen that false syren who wrecked his life before. Well, I don't think the brilliant Gertrude stands much chance against our Mayflower!"

From his sister's love affairs his mind wandered not unnaturally to his own. He had known now for many a year the face he wanted for the sunshine of his home. He had loved Dolores ever since the old childish days when she came to the Court as May's play-fellow; but Geoffrey Dean was romantic.

Some men are content to give love. He wanted to be loved in return. Besides, he knew the Fane family, and understood the terrible pressure that would be put on Dolly to accept a suitor such as himself.

He would never speak a word of love to her until he felt she was prepared to listen to him; and if she said "no," none of her own family should learn what she had refused. He would keep the secret even from his mother and May.

It was the unselfishness of his love kept him silent. As things were, Lady Dean and her daughter could do a great deal to brighten up the girl's grey life; but, if she once refused its master (however well he kept the secret), the Court could no longer be her second home.

He feared no opposition from his own people. Lady Dean was not a mercenary woman. She would have objected to a plain or

vulgar daughter-in-law; but Dolores' beauty would shed lustre on her name, and no one could possibly have mistaken her for anyone but a lady.

As a family, the haughty matron disliked the Fanes; but the Rector and his wife were very worthy people, against whom, as connections, nothing could be said; while their known objection to worldly vanity made it more than probable they would not trouble their daughter with many visits if she became Sir Geoffrey's wife. Therefore, the Baronet knew his mother would approve, while May was one of those tender-hearted creatures who are quite content to let their friends be happy in their own way.

So Sir Geoffrey's hopes ran high. He had but one difficulty to face, Dolores herself; and as she never shrank from his society, and gave him her friendship and confidence as frankly as when she was ten years old, it did not seem to him she would condemn him to despair.

Dolores went straight to her own room after parting from her lover. She flung herself on the sofa, and tried to think, but everything seemed in a maze.

Rex loved her! That was enough for happiness! She felt quite a different creature from the little, lonely ne'er-do-well who had come to the Court.

It proved the depths of the girl's love, I think, that she never once reflected on all that Lord Carlyon affection would bring to her. It never struck her that all the failings condemned in Dolores Fane would be almost virtues in Lady Carlyon—that her father and mother—pious though they were—would confess the mistress of Carlyon Manor was a credit to them, and that she should be courted by the very people who now shunned her.

Of all this Dolores recked nothing. Her mind had room but for one thought—Reginald loved her!

He loved her! He would protect her henceforward from every unkind word. She would never be lonely any more. She need never again regret each birthday as a sign that her youth was leaving her, for Reginald would love her just the same when the silver threads clustered in her hair.

"I am almost too happy," thought poor little Dolores. "I have just nothing left to wish for! I can even forgive that cruel Gertrude, for, if she had not forsaken him, he would never have come here!"

She had forbidden her lover to publish their engagement till he had returned from his aunt's; but she had not the least dread of his former *fiancée* reconquering his heart. Our little ne'er-do-well had an immense faith in those she loved.

Rex was *hers* now, and he would be true to her. Besides, for more than eighteen months he had been in a position he knew the fair widow could not refuse. Any day for a year and a half he could have made Gertrude Lady Carlyon, and, as he had not done so, there could be no danger of the wish coming to him now.

"Rex," thought Dolores, proudly, "means king. He was made to be a king! My king!"

She dwelt a little fondly on the last pronoun. Then she got up and began to arrange her hair, for it was nearly lunch-time. As she took her way to May's room she felt just a little regret she had not made one exception to her rule of secrecy.

May had so often reproached her for not appreciating Reginald Carlyon, she would surely be pleased to know that at last her two favourites understood each other. Gaily she passed down the corridor singing a snatch of some old ballad. Poor little Dolores! poor little ne'er-do-well! how long it was before she sang again! In the dark after time Dolly used to wonder how she could have been so happy?—why no presentiment warned her of the coming clouds!

She tapped lightly at the door. No answer, and she went in. She and May were too

much like sisters to stand on ceremony with each other; but the sight which met her gave her a shock which drove away for a moment all thought of her own happiness!

(To be continued.)

## FLIES AND THEIR HABITS.

THE horse-fly is the most cruel and blood-thirsty of the entire family. He is armed with a most formidable weapon, which consists of four lancets, so sharp and strong that they will penetrate leather. When not in use they are nicely folded away in a sheath. He makes his appearance in June, and may often be seen in the vicinity of small streams of water. He is said to subsist in part upon an airy diet, and to pass his life harmlessly. Not so the female, for she is armed with six lancets, with which she bleeds both cattle and horses, and even human beings. She lays her eggs in moist places, and, after they are hatched into footless maggots, they make all necessary journeys by stretching and closing the segments of their bodies, their heads being supplied by two hooks, by which they get their food. In process of time this maggot goes down into moist earth, where it reposes for some weeks, after which it bursts the pupa case, and comes forth a large black fly, armed and equipped like its predecessors.

The sewer and cess-pool fly resemble each other in their habits, with a single exception—the former lives in cleaner water and has a less complicated apparatus. The female lays her eggs where they may be reached by the filthy fluid. The young are soon hatched, and may be seen floating on the water and taking in all its bad qualities; they die if placed in clean water. They dart swiftly about and go down for the space of a minute, but are obliged to rise to breathe. In the course of time they seek a dry place, and after their wings have grown, emerge regular flies like their parents, ready to repeat their filthy but useful work. We can form only a vague idea how greatly we are indebted to these loathsome insects as scavengers.

## STUMBLING BLOCKS TO POESY.

THERE are a number of words in our language for which there is no rhyme. As an illustration, can our readers find words to rhyme with "silver" or "window"? The latter has been the subject of many a rhyming contest, the palm being borne off on one occasion by the author of the following:—

"A cruel man a beetle caught,  
And to the wall him pinned—oh!  
Then said the beetle to the crowd,  
'Though I'm stuck up I am not proud,'  
And his soul flew out of the window."

This reminds one of the verbal contortions of Gilbert, who, in "Pinafore" declares that the noble seamen, though their foes they may thump any, are scarcely fit company for a high-born maiden. This genial author furnishes some facts from his own experience. "Revenge" and "avenge" have no rhymes but "Penge" and "stonehenge," "coit" has no rhyme at all. "Starve" has no rhyme except "carve." "Scarl" has no rhyme, as "laugh" and "halt" and "calt" certainly are not admissible. "Scalp" has no rhyme but "alp." "False" has no rhyme; "valse" is near it, but the French accent disqualifies it; "waltz" is near it, but the "t," spoils it. "Babe" has no rhyme but "astrolabe," certain proper names excepted. "Gamboge" has no rhyme but "rouge." "Tube" would be rhymeless, save for "cube" and "jajube." "Fugue" has no rhyme at all. "Gulf" rhymes with no English word. We have to fall back on "Cardinal Pandolph" and "Uit"; the minstrel "Azimuth" has only "doth," "Calm" and "asp" have no English rhymes. Orange also goes begging for rhymes.





## SOCIETY.

A WELL-KNOWN lady has been creating a sensation in the *Recess* hunting-field by appearing in a "pink" habit.

ACCORDING to private telegrams received, Prince Albert Victor has created a very favourable impression in India.

THE dressing of hair is quite interesting just now, for every day it is getting more closely to resemble the style that was *à la mode* at the beginning of Her Majesty's reign.

THE private chapel at Balmoral has walls panelled with Scotch fir from Balmoral Forest, and polished to such perfection that it looks like satin wood. The windows of the chapel are millioned, and filled in with stained glass.

A NEW fancy of luxurious New York girls is to wear Japanese gowns—which the Oriental importers bring over especially for them—in their bedrooms as a substitute for the ordinary wrapper. These gowns are exquisitely pretty and comfortable.

FARMING is becoming quite a fashionable occupation just now, and we have no doubt that the time will come when a university education will be quite the middle-class programme, while the best families will follow the business of our ancestor, Adam.

THE "interesting invalid" is a thing of the past. It is no longer fashionable to feign delicacy, nor are the girls of the coming generation actuated by an insane desire to appear fragile and gentle at the expense of health.

A FAMOUS shirt-maker in the West end, who has hitherto only supplied gentlemen, has consented to give hunting shirts to some Warwickshire ladies. They are made exactly like men's but with short breasts, the linen front cut round, and only reaching half-way to the waist.

SHORT people are now made taller by false feet made of cork into which the fibres of the natural feet are so carefully blended that the deception is scarcely to be detected.

IT is odd to notice that white, so much worn now, even in the winter, was equally popular in 1833. The whole style of dress, colours, materials, everything is being modelled on the taste of that time.

THE fashionable jewellers in New York are displaying ladies' garters among the pins and bracelets, chains and brooches, in their windows. These garters are all of the old-fashioned kind, simple bands of elastic with ornate buckles and clasps of gold, sometimes set with jewels, and sometimes merely chased. They cost about twenty-five dollars upward.

THE apartments occupied by the Emperor and Empress during their visit to the Sultan were splendid in the extreme, and the Empress's room seemed like a scene taken out of the "Arabian Nights." The bed was mattress of silver, the curtains were of a golden tissue embroidered with real pearls, and of a richness only to be equalled in the East.

THE Emperor of Russia, as has been often before remarked, in constant dread of assassination, and this state of ever-present fear added to the hereditary melancholy of the Romanoff family, has so utterly shattered his nerves that for days together he is practically not responsible for his actions. The Emperor smokes incessantly, and not only endeavours to sustain his spirits by copious libations of champagne and brandy, but of late he has taken to drugging himself with chloral.

IT appears that a celebrated doctor has found out a way to thin stout people, and give them waists once more, but his patients usually cry out at first that the remedy is worse than the disease. They must manage without liquids, save one small cup of coffee each day. If they pine and clamour for more, they are allowed a cup of boiling water as hot as it can be taken. Oranges and lemons are allowed, and most other fruit when in season. The specialist makes out that there would be many more elegant figures in the world if people drank by teaspoonfuls instead of gallons.

## STATISTICS.

FRANCE is the second largest wheat producer in the world, the only country which exceeds it being the United States.

ACCORDING to the *Uhlände Wochenschrift* the total consumption of tobacco in Europe may be put down at an average of 2½ lbs. to each inhabitant.

IT is estimated that the weight of the smoke cloud which daily hangs over London at about 50 tons of solid carbon, and 250 tons of carbon in the form of hydro carbon and carbonic oxide gases.

DURING the year 1887 the United Kingdom imported staple articles of food to the value of £118,000,000, including live animals and meat, butter, cheese, and eggs, wheat and flour, grain, hops, and sugar, and fruits and vegetables.

HOW many Jews are there in the world? According to the "Archives Judaïques" of Paris, altogether 6,300,000. Of this total there are no fewer than 5,400,000 in Europe, the rest being apportioned thus—Asia, 300,000; Africa, 350,000; and America, 250,000.

THE greatest known depth of the sea is in the South Atlantic Ocean, midway between the island of Tristan d'Acunha and the mouth of the Rio de la Plata. The bottom was there reached at a depth of 40,285 feet, or eight and three-quarter miles, exceeding by more than seven thousand feet the height of Mount Everest, the loftiest mountain in the world.

## GEMS.

TRUTH outlives pain, as the soul does life.

WHEN we do good to our fellow-sufferers we invest in a savings-bank from which the heart receives the interest.

IF Satan ever laughs it must be at hypocrites—they being the greatest dupes he has; they serve him better than others, and receive no wages.

KNOWLEDGE may slumber in the memory, but it never dies; it is like the dormouse in the ivied tower, that sleeps while winter lasts, but awakes with the warm breath of spring.

THAT man is most successful who best and most fully puts to useful service all his powers and faculties; who finds and utilizes the opportunity for their employment; or, in other words, gets into the place which he is best fitted to fill.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BREAD AND JAM PUDDING.—Line the bottom and sides of a basin with slices of bread; mix a pot of jam with a little hot water, put a layer of the jam in the basin, then a layer of bread, then more jam; continue this until the basin is full; put a plate on the top. Turn out the next day, and serve with custard round it.

TO CLEAN PAINT.—Smear a piece of flannel in whitening, mix to the consistency of common paste in warm water, rub the surface to be cleaned briskly, and wash off with pure cold water. Grease spots will in this way be almost instantly removed, as well as other dirt, and the paint will retain its brilliancy and beauty unimpaired.

A GOOD LIGHT CAKE.—Beat a pound of butter to a cream, and add it to the same weight of flour and of sugar pounded fine and stirred into the yolks of six eggs; then beat in the whites, whipped to a stiff froth, a wineglass of brandy in which rose-leaves have been steeped, a small nutmeg grated, and a small teaspoonful of soda dissolved in a tablespoonful of hot water. Beat the whole together until it is light and creamy, then add a pound of raisins stoned and chopped. Strain a cupful of flour over them before putting them into the cake, line a tin with buttered paper, put in the cake mixture, and bake it one hour and a quarter in a quick oven.

## SUPERSTITIONS.

IN France, in which the Christmas observances were formally abolished in the anti-Christian reaction of 1793, there was a belief that bread baked at Christmas would remain incorruptible for ten years, and that it was useful in diseases of cows.

THE gipsies have a superstition that the ivy and holly and pine-tree never told a word where our Saviour was hiding Himself, and so they keep alive all the winter, and look green all the year. But the ash, like the oak, told of Him when He was hiding, so they have to remain dead through the winter. And so the gipsies always burn an ash-fire every Great Day.

THE superstition that cattle kneel at midnight on Christmas Eve, in recognition of the anniversary of the Saviour's birth, is still said to exist in some parts of England; while the belief that water drawn at twelve o'clock on Christmas night is miraculously turned into wine is no less widely diffused. In Mecklenburg it is not allowable to call certain animals by their right names; and he who does not say "long tail," for example, for fox, pays a forfeit.

A CURIOUS superstition prevailed, till recently, in Wiltshire. The wife of a labourer came to the clergyman on Christmas Day to get a sacrament shilling, (i.e. one from the offertory), to hang round the neck of her son, who was subject to fits. Twelve pennies must be collected from twelve maidens and exchanged for an ordinary shilling, and this for the sacrament shilling, or the charms had no value. The twelve pence, it is suggested, had some relation to the twelve apostles.

IN Poland, and elsewhere, it is believed on Christmas night the heavens are opened, and the scene of Jacob's ladder is re-enacted, and it is only permitted to the saints to see it. Throughout Northern Germany the tables are spread and lights left burning during the entire night, that the Virgin Mary, and the angel who passes when everybody sleeps, may find something to eat. In certain parts of Austria they put candles in the windows, that the Christ-child may not stumble in passing through the village.

THE first person to cross the threshold on Christmas morning is awaited with great anxiety, for if he (a male is desirable), be dark-haired he will bring good luck, if fair the opposite; while a squinting first foot is to be dreaded beyond all. That the first foot shall be of the required sex and colour, generally the arrangements are made for relatives to visit each other at the time, or the good man of the house will not infrequently slip out a few minutes before twelve on Christmas Eve to solemnly apply for admittance a few minutes after. A first foot should never come with his hands empty of a gift.

THOSE who fall to speak of the many vulgar customs and quaint superstitions associated with the Christmas holidays. In some places, as in Suabia, it is customary for maidens, inquisitive as to their prospective lovers, to draw a stick of wood out of a heap to see whether he will be long or short, crooked or straight. At other times they will pour melted lead into cold water, and from the figures formed will prognosticate the trade or profession of their future husbands. If they imagine they see a plate, or a hat, or a pair of shears, it signifies that he is to be a carpenter, or shoemaker, or tailor; while a hammer or pickaxe indicates a smith, or an common labourer. The maidens of Pfälzingen, when they wish to ascertain which of them will first become a wife, form a circle and place in their midst a blind-folded gander, and the one to whom he goes first will soon be a bride; while the Tyrolese peasants, on the "knocking nights," listen as the baying owens, and if they hear music, it signifies an early wedding; but if the singing is dull, it forbodes the death of the listener. Among many others a favourite method of forecasting the future is to sit upon the floor and throw one's shoes with the foot over the shoulder, and then to predict from the position assumed what is about to happen.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**VIOLA**.—See answer to "Edith."

**BARRARA**.—See answer to "Molly."

**DIANA**.—See answer to "Romantic Baby."

**TOM**.—A little caution is required on such occasions.

**EDITH**.—A young lady is under the control of her parents until she is twenty-one.

**DAIRY MAID**.—There is no way of making yourself pale without injuring your health.

**ANXIOUS JEW**.—You had better apply to the shipping office, where you will get all particulars.

**C. J.**.—Horses were first introduced on the English stage in "Bluebird" February 18, 1811.

**ETHELRED**.—The reason for the substitution is that a cheque when crossed is only payable through a bank.

**BELLA**.—Small out-glass smelling-bottles, with gold or silver tops, make handsome and acceptable wedding presents.

**ANNIE**.—Mites are found not only in cheese but in preserves, meal, dried fish, and other articles of domestic consumption.

**HENRY**.—Certainly not. It would be very bad taste. His own good sense and the lady's should point out how many times.

**GRAY EYES**.—Gray eyes are generally clear and intelligent, not always remarkable for beauty, but more indicative of character than either brown or blue.

**H. B.**.—We think the books referred to are well worth the price paid for them, being superior in every respect to the lower-priced ones, with which you compare them.

**LEIGH KALSCROFT**.—It is possible, by constant application, for one who has natural qualification, to learn a system without further instruction than the books give.

**X.**.—There is an overflow of shorthand writers in large cities. In a few instances—where the writer is first-class—the pay is good, but in many cases the salary is not large.

**QUEENIE**.—From your description of his proceedings, the young gentleman does not appear to know his own mind, and you would be wise to have nothing more to do with him.

**FERNAND**.—John Bull is the national nickname for an Englishman, represented as a bluff, kind-hearted, bull-headed farmer. The character is from a satire by Dr. Arbuthnot.

**OLD SUBSCRIBER**.—The relative merits of engineering and shorthand as an occupation depends upon the adaptability and inclination of the person who thinks of choosing between them.

**VALENTINE**.—A gentleman would never be guilty of the vulgarity of taking a lady's arm. On a promenade and in circumstances where the lady needs assistance, he should offer her his arm.

**MIRIAM**.—You will obtain all information about the necessary qualifications and the mode of getting the situation at the place you mention; the duties are matters to be studied afterwards.

**MOTHER OF TWO**.—You might try feeding your baby on gruel made from fine grits. Infants' ailments are often a matter of feeding; but there may be something wrong as well, and it is safer to have proper advice.

**IGNORAMOUS**.—Mikado is not a title, though we use it as if it were. It signifies royal gate, and is merely a descriptive indication, just like Sublime Porte, of which, singularly enough, it is a far Eastern repetition.

**J. VERNON**.—A tinker's dam has nothing to do with swearing. It is merely the dam or stoppage, made of flour and water, with which the tinker stops the gap he is mending, until the tin or the pewter he is using has cooled.

**B. B.**.—Arrowroot is a native plant of South America, and cultivated in the West Indies. It is a creeping root, with stalks about two feet high, and the roots, pounded and bleached, make the starch, which is used as nutritious food.

**"LOVE'S GOLDEN DREAM"**.—1. It is always better for the gentleman to be the elder, but a year is a very slight difference. Mutual affection is the first thing to be considered. 2. Basil and Lillian are from the plants basil and lily.

**MOTHER OF THREE**.—There are enough good names without inventing new ones. The simpler and more common the name the better. A good old Bible name, which has been simple and common for centuries, ought to be acceptable.

**MUSICAL**.—The Boehm flute is named from Theobald Boehm, flutist to the King of Bavaria, who made the first one about 1833. It is described as resembling the German flute; but it has more and different keys, which make it more perfect in tone.

**GRIVE**.—1. The 11th September, 1863, was on Monday. 2. See answer to "A General Servant" in No. 789. 3. The young lady has a piquant, bright face, and pretty features. 4. The writing is fairly good; a little practice would improve it very much.

**ESTHER**.—There are many receipts for turning dark hair golden; any hairdresser will recommend you one, but if you are wise, you will let your hair alone. All dyes are mischievous, and in time spoil the finest head of hair by rendering it brittle and dry.

**QUEEN MAID**.—1. The myrtle signifies love. 2. It is pleasant to know the tales are appreciated.

**ONE IN LOVE**.—Many girls fancy they are in love at seventeen, and it is quite possible for them to be so; but those who wait a little longer before thinking of love and marriage are likelier to be happier than others who take life's cares upon them so early.

**RUTH**.—1. You will find what you want in many books of puzzles and charades. Why not make one for yourself? 2. What you ask depends so entirely on the colour and arrangement of your room that it is impossible to answer your question satisfactorily.

**ROMANTIC BABY**.—We do not know the address of any fortune teller, and should certainly not give it publication if we did. Anyone professing to look into futurity by any means whatever is simply a cheat and a swindler, and liable to be prosecuted and punished as such.

**DATA**.—The tread-mill was originally an invention of the Chinese to raise water for the irrigation of the fields. The complicated tread-mill used in prisons for the purpose of discipline was the invention of Sir William Cubitt, of England. It was first erected in 1817.

**TINY**.—1. A girl of sixteen is rather too young to be allowed to accept regular attentions from a gentleman. She should, however, be guided by her mother's advice in the matter. 2. Unless a man is in a relation of a girl, or is engaged to be married to her, he has no right to kiss her.

**G. C.**.—The shimmering or slinging sound of vessels upon the fire just before boiling is supposed to be caused by vibratory movements produced in the liquid by the formation of vapour bubbles. As the heating continues, they rise higher and higher until they reach the surface and escape into the air.

**MOLLY**.—The clearness or otherwise of a person's complexion depends very often on the state of his or her health. Nothing is better than the constant use of soap and water, and plenty of fresh air and exercise. Clipping the eyebrows sometimes makes them grow, but the practice is not one to be commended.

## THE WELCOME HOME.

A bright face at the window,  
A glad laugh in the hall,  
A cry, "Oh, papa's coming!"  
Again I hear it all.  
Again I feel the kisses  
Of baby lips on mine,  
And round my neck dear little arms  
Most lovingly entwine.

Ah, but the face has vanished  
That watched for me at night;  
The laugh whose welcome  
Was full of love's delight.  
My heart cries out in sorrow  
For what my life must miss—  
The baby's face, the baby's arms,  
The baby's clasp and kiss.

When I go home to Heaven,  
I know that I shall see,  
The dear face of my darling,  
As she looks out for me.  
"Oh, papa, papa's coming!"  
She'll cry and quickly come,  
To Heaven's door to meet me  
And kiss me welcome home.

H. B.

**BENTHA**.—The term "blue stocking," applied to literary ladies, was conferred on a society which was called the Blue Stocking Club, in which females were admitted, and so-called owing to a Mr. Benjamin Stillingfleet, one of its acting members, wearing blue stockings.

**ROSA**.—A fair education is necessary for a female clerk in the post office, or indeed anywhere. Reading and writing are, of course, the principal branches required, but much more is wanted to enable any young woman to take a good position. Your writing would hardly be good enough, we think.

**ALPHA**.—Rain within the tropics is not of the drizzling character of rain in the temperate zone, but generally falls in such torrents as, in other zones, would be called waterspouts. They produce great floods in a single day. Winter is distinguished from summer chiefly by the quantity of rain.

**ALPHA**.—The average longevity of literary ladies would indicate that activity of the brain has the effect of lengthening their lives rather than shortening them. Mrs. Bebbald and Mrs. Edgeworth died at 82. Jane Porter died at 74, Hannah More at 88, and Miss Mitford at 69. The average longevity of the five ladies was 79 years.

**BROOKFIELD**.—From ten to twelve ounces a day is the amount of meat required for a healthy adult who takes an ordinary amount of work and exercise. As a rule women eat less than this, and delude themselves with the idea that they do not require as much food as men, even when they work as hard. Hence it is that so many women drift into invalidism in middle age.

**HARRY**.—It strikes us that the young lady is a sensible girl. As she is but sixteen she is too young to desire "steady company," and her mind and ideas should mature before she should be willing to accept attention from one gentleman to the exclusion of all other gentlemen. You are both so young you can afford to wait a few years, and then perhaps she will listen favourably to your suit.

**INEXPERIENCED**.—The tuning of a harmonium is a very complicated affair. We advise you not to attempt it. The charge is not high, and it is well worth employing experienced hands, as amateurs invariably put the instrument out of order. Some harmoniums allow of the notes being taken out and tuned separately, in which case they can be sent by post and returned.

**ANNIE**.—You are what is called a blonde-brune. A blonde should have a fair skin, blue eyes and light hair, while a brunette should have a dark olive skin, dark eyes and black hair, eyebrows and eyelashes. The blonde-brune has brown hair, blue or grey eyes, a complexion which is neither olive nor very fair, and dark eyebrows and eyelashes, usually not very heavy.

**F. M.**.—Lumber is a term peculiar to America, where it is applied chiefly to timber in all its preparatory stages, from its growth in the woods until it comes into the hands of the artificer for the purpose of being worked up, principally in the form of scantling, deals, inch thick boards, clap boards, staves, and hoops. Varieties of pine constitute the great bulk of what is usually termed lumber in British America.

**F. R. V.**.—Incense was first used by the ancient Egyptians in their worship, and afterwards by the Jews. The early Christians probably took the custom of burning it from them. It is usually a powder made up of benzoin, storax, and other resins, cascarilla bark, &c. The powder is so placed that it will drop little by little on a hot plate in the bottom of the censer, and as it burns the smoke escapes through little holes. The censer used in churches is a silver vessel hung by chains and swung in the hand.

**PRETTY POLLIE**.—The wedding anniversaries are named as follows:—First year, cotton wedding; second year, paper wedding; third year, leather wedding; fifth year, wooden wedding; seventh year, woollen wedding; tenth year, tin wedding; twelfth year, silk and fine linen wedding; fifteenth year, crystal wedding; twentieth year, china wedding; twenty-fifth year, silver wedding; thirtieth year, pearl wedding; fortieth year, ruby wedding; fiftieth year, golden wedding; seventy-fifth year, diamond wedding.

**SAILOR**.—The punishment of "keelhauling," to which Mr. Pimmsall refers as being justly earned by certain shipwreckers, used to be peculiar to the Dutch navy for certain offences, and was not unknown in the British on "special occasions." The *modus operandi* is as follows:—The offender is suspended by a rope from one yardarm, with weights to his legs, and a rope fastened to him, leading under the ship's bottom to the opposite yardarm, and being let fall into the water, he is drawn under the ship's bottom and raised on the other side.

**J. BARTON**.—Though it is true to a large extent that a conversationalist is born, not made, it is also true that study, properly directed, will greatly assist a naturally poor talker who desires to remedy his natural defect. Read history, light poetry, and wholesome fiction, and endeavour to put yourself on ordinary topics of conversation. It is not probable that you have the "story-teller's gift." Still, an interesting fund of humorous anecdotes is necessary to the conversationalist's stock in trade. You should try to correctly observe human nature, and to understand the temperaments of those with whom you are talking.

**CONSTANT READER**.—We have read that oatmeal, worked up in the hand with honey-soap at the time of washing, produces a fine, creamy lather which is a most efficacious cosmetic. This may be so; as it is stated in some of the old books, that the Highland belles of the olden time were familiar with the harmless but valuable properties of oatmeal for softening and bleaching the skin, and were accustomed to use it whenever they were anxious to render themselves particularly killing. The efficacy of such a cosmetic as that might be tested at small expense and with perfect safety. Glycerine and vasoline soften the skin without injuring it. Lavender water has the same effect.

**LOVER OF FOWLS**.—1. Bantam fowls are named from the town of Bantam in Java, but it is said that they were first brought from India. 2. The Seabright bantam, first raised in England by Sir John Seabright, is a beautiful bird of mixed colours, with smooth legs. 3. The Brahmapootra, named from the river of that name in India, are large grey fowls, and are thought by some to be part Shanghai and part Chittagong. 4. Poland fowls are supposed to have been first brought from Poland, and Dorking fowls were first raised in Dorking, England. 5. The black Spanish fowls are sometimes called Fayal fowls, because many are raised in that island. 6. The common barn-yard fowls are supposed to be a mixture of many breeds.

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